



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY LEARNING

A review of research, policy and good practice

Photography:

Front cover, Pedagogiek Ontwikkeling 0-7, Amsterdam

© Devi Roebers

*Report researched and prepared by Margaret Kernan,
International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) Leiden on behalf of
Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	6
INTRODUCTION	11
PART 1: RESEARCH AND POLICY CONTEXT ON PARENTS, FAMILIES AND EARLY LEARNING	12
1.1 Why involve parents in early learning?	12
1.2 Definitions and frameworks for understanding parental involvement	14
1.2.1 Defining parental involvement	14
1.2.2 Parents and professionals and the balance of power	15
1.2.3 Using frameworks to critically reflect on and improve parental involvement policies and practice	17
1.3 What does research tell us about parents' and families' role in learning outcomes?	19
1.3.1 Background to the literature review	19
1.3.2 Impact of family factors, and 'at home good parenting' on learning outcomes	19
1.3.3 Intergenerational perspectives on learning outcomes	20
1.3.4 Parents engagement in children's language and literacy	20
1.3.5 Implications for policy	21
1.4 Current national policy in the Netherlands	22
1.5 Forms of parental involvement in the Netherlands	25
1.5.1 What parenting support services are available to parents of young children?	26
1.5.2 Reaching families most in need of parenting and early learning support	27
1.5.3 What do we know about parental involvement in early learning in ECEC and school settings?	27
PART 2: CASE STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE	29
2.1 Outcomes and learning about parental involvement in Early Learning from Bernard van Leer Foundation supported projects and initiatives	29
2.2 International good practice	32
2.3 Three case studies in the Netherlands	33
2.3.1 Ouderconsulenten, Rotterdam	33
2.3.2 SPIL Eindhoven	38
2.3.3 Vroeghulp Loket, Kind en Jeugd, Tilburg	41
2.3.4 Learning from case studies of good practice	45
REFERENCES	47
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	52
APPENDICES	53

GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

BKK	Bureau Kwaliteit Kinderopvang/Centre for Childcare Quality
BOINK	Belangenvereniging Ouders in de Kinderopvang/Parents representative organization for childcare
BvLF	Bernard van Leer Foundation
CPB	Dutch Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis
CBS	Central Bureau for Statistics
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal
CJG	Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin/Centre for Children and Families
DDJGZ	Digitaal Dossier Jeugdgezondheidszorg
DECET	Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training – a European Network
EACEA	The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Union
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ENSAC	European Network for School-Age Childcare
EPPSE 3-16	Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education
EU	European Union
FSW	Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Leiden
G4	Four largest cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht
G37	37 largest municipalities in the Netherlands
GGD	Gemeentelijke of Gemeenschappelijke Gezondheidsdienst/ Public Health Services
HBO	Hoger Beroep Onderwijs/Professional level education
IB'er	Interne Begeleider/Staff Mentor
ICDI	International Child Development Initiatives
LEA	Lokale Educatieve Agenda/Municipal education cooperation
MEE	State supported organization for people with disabilities
MIM	Moeders Informeren Moeders/Mothers Inform Mothers
Min. OCW	Ministry for Education, Culture and Science
Min. VWS	Ministry Health Welfare and Sport
NGO	Non governmental organisation
MR	Medezeggenschapsraad/Parent advisory board
NJi	Nederlands Jeugd Instituut/
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
O&O	Opvoedingsondersteuning en Ontwikkelingstimulering/Childrearing Support and Stimulating Development
PAOO	Platform Allochtone Ouders en Onderwijs/Platform for non-Native Parents and Education

PvdA	Labour Party
PSZ	Peuterspeelzaal/Pre-school playgroup for 2 to 4-year-olds
ROC	Regionaal Opleidingcentrum/Lower vocational training and adult education institutes
SCP	Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau/Bureau for social policy analysis
SES	Socio Economic Status
SPIL	Speel, Integreren, Leren/Play, integration and learning initiative, Eindhoven
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UU	University of Utrecht
UvA	University of Amsterdam
VBK	Resource and research centre for early childhood education and care, Ghent, Belgium
VHL	Vroeghulp Lokaal/Early help service
VNG	Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten/Umbrella organisation for municipalities in the Netherlands
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy
VVE	Voor-en-Vroegschoolse Educatie/early childhood education
VVI	Vroeg, Voortdurend, Integraal/Early diagnosis and integrated support initiative for families where there is a concern about young children's development
VU	Free University of Amsterdam
Wet OKE	Wet Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie/Act for Development Opportunities through Quality and Education
WMO	Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning/Support for Social Participation Act
WMS	Wet Medezeggenschap op Scholen/Participation in Schools Act
ZAT	Zorg en Advies Team/Care and Advice Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has been carried out on behalf of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in order to gain more insight into the current theories and practices in relation to parental involvement in early learning in the Netherlands. It is based on national and international research literature, policy reports, as well as discussions with key informants which took place between September 2011 and January 2012.

The study has been carried out around a number of key questions: Why involve parents in early learning? What factors need to be taken into account?; What are the current policies and provision for parental involvement in early learning in the Netherlands? What do we learn about parental involvement from case studies of good practice?

Why involve parents in early learning?

The main arguments proposed in the literature for engaging parents in young children's learning are:

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators International bodies such as OECD and UNICEF characterise the involvement of parents in young children's education as a fundamental right and obligation.

Parents and what they do have a powerful effect on children's learning

There is robust evidence which links the home learning environment, including parenting behaviours and attitudes, to children's learning outcomes. Key factors are a literacy rich home environment, quantity and quality of cognitive stimulation, parental sensitivity and child-centred emotional support and emphasis on the value of learning.

Parents and professionals working in partnership benefit children The essence of partnership is respectful listening and sharing of information between parents and practitioners about children's learning and development at home, and at an early childhood education and care (ECEC)¹ service. Partnership involves responsibility on both sides.

Enhancing quality in ECEC Engaging families and community is one of five policy levers, which OECD Starting Strong III has identified that are likely to enhance quality in ECEC.

ECEC offers parenting support As well as providing learning and development opportunities for children, good quality ECEC offers child rearing advice and peer support to parents, referrals to more specialised services if necessary, and it frees parents to engage in training, lifelong learning and employment. This is important for all children, but particularly so for children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances.

What factors need to be taken into account?

The extent and form of parental engagement in early learning is strongly influenced by a family's social class, mothers' level of education and psychosocial health, single parent status, and, to a lesser degree, family ethnicity Research also indicates that there is a very strong correlation between the cognitive development of parents during their own childhood and that of their children.

¹ Throughout this report we use the term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to match the most common international terminology, which is being used by the OECD and the European Commission.

When the topic of working in partnership with parents in ECEC is discussed, it is often tacitly understood that parents mean mothers. **Fathers and male practitioners have tended to be invisible in services for young children.**

Children, mothers and fathers and practitioners all have a role to play in early learning. Attention therefore needs to be paid to parent-child relationships; practitioner-child relationships; child-child relationships and parent-practitioner relationships. It is recognised that **parents and practitioners may need support to make these learning partnerships work.** Families dealing with stressful circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, family breakdown or addiction need particular support.

National and international research indicates that relations between practitioners and parents are often strained. Factors accounting for this include:

- » **Lack of confidence** on part of both parents and practitioners regarding mutual communication
- » **Different understandings and expectations** of each other's contribution to children's early learning
- » **Differences in views** between parents and practitioners regarding respective responsibilities for child-rearing and education
- » **Lack of attention to skills necessary** to work with parents and families in pre-service and in-service training of practitioners.

What are the current policies and provisions for parental involvement in early learning in the Netherlands?

There is a wide variety of child-rearing support and early learning advice which parents of young children can potentially tap into. However, **not all forms of support and advice are accessible to all groups of parents**, due to costs involved, unevenness of coverage, gaps in provision, waiting times and a lack of awareness amongst parents regarding support.

Attention to parenting and child-rearing support via home-visiting parenting support and early learning programmes and parenting classes has primarily focussed on disadvantaged groups. With some exceptions, these are typically part-financed by national government administered via municipalities and outsourced to welfare organisations for implementation. **Parents themselves report that they are more likely to seek child-rearing support and advice from their child's daycare centre, pre-school and school, than from the Centre for Children and Family (Centra voor Jeugd En Gezin) and Baby and Child Health Clinic (Consultatie Bureau), school doctor or social work services.** Low educated parents and unemployed parents receive relatively little informal support from family and friends compared to middle and higher educated and working parents.

The degree to which parents and/or schools are 'responsible' for children's learning outcomes is a topical issue in educational and social policy in the Netherlands. The **current government policy emphasises joint responsibility between formal educational institutions and parents for learning outcomes.** Language and literacy development are **emphasised.** The government tone on this issue is experienced by many parents as 'finger-wagging' and unsupportive.

Research has pointed to the **lack of harmonisation** between child-rearing and education at home and in ECEC and school settings, and the **need to improve communication between parents and practitioners**.

In recent years there have been a number of initiatives - printed and online guidelines, handbooks, in-service workshops, film material, online discussion fora - to support ECEC services and schools to enhance parental involvement, and to develop conditions for and improve learning partnerships between parents and ECEC services and schools. Despite these initiatives, **some academic researchers speak about worsening relations and little meaningful participation between parents and schools**, to the detriment of children.

Up to recently, most government attention has been paid to parental involvement in formal primary school settings. However, new agreements between government and municipalities which, in theory provide parents with easily accessible child-rearing advice and referrals to more specialised support via Centres for Children and Families, and which promote parental involvement in early learning mark a policy shift in this regard. However, important to note is the **huge variation across 430 municipalities regarding how these measures work/will work in practice**. Furthermore, many child and family focussed initiatives and financial supports to families with young children are under threat because of local and national government cuts.

Internationally, **a combination and comprehensive approach to ECEC is advocated, particularly when tackling the needs of families and young children living in disadvantaged circumstances. This includes: intensive, early starting, child-focussed, centre-based education together with strong parental involvement, parent education, programmed educational home activities and measures of family support**. Furthermore, ECEC must be linked to initiatives in other policy areas such as employment, housing, health, etc in a comprehensive strategy (European Commission, 2011).

What do we learn from case studies of good practice?

The study includes seven case studies of good practice, national and international, in relation to parental involvement in early learning. Key points of interest and learning are:

- » The benefits of **a continuum or joined-up services for young children and their families**. This entails making sure services are physically close to where families with young children live; effective communication and sharing between home and ECEC settings; taking the whole child-rearing, family and relational context in account when supporting children's early learning and development; working collaboratively with home based services, social and health services and adult education.
- » **Political commitment and a longterm vision** has been a key success factor for sustainability of policies and practice, ensuring coherence and continuity even when government changes. Governments also depend on sound information and research data from practice to inform policies. The most effective initiatives are those which demonstrate strong links and cooperation between practice, research and policy.
- » Importance of **engaging fathers as well as mothers in supporting their children's learning** and development.
- » Viewing **parents, practitioners and children all as active learners**,

ensuring a greater balance of power and respectful relations between parents and practitioners.

- » Attention to ensuring that **practitioners are skilled in responding to a diversity of families and parents** (different countries of origin and cultural background, social class, educational level, fathers and mothers) and to families' changing needs and circumstances. As noted by one interviewee "the starting point should be that parents have questions, not problems".

Conclusions

ECEC services are assuming an increasingly important role in supporting families and promoting the wellbeing of young boys and girls and giving them – in co-operation with their parents – a good start to life-long learning. Therefore, **ECEC is not just about working with children it should also about working with and supporting families**, and ultimately about how societies function.

A review of the forms of parental involvement in early learning in informal, non-formal and formal settings in the Netherlands indicates that there is a wide range of initiatives, programmes and information resources designed to support parents. However, because of uncertainties about the respective role of parents and institutions in children's childrearing and education, decentralisation of social services and education policy to the 430 municipalities, changing government priorities, and looming budget cuts, coverage of these supports is uneven and there are gaps in provision.

An important conclusion of this study is that ECEC as a parenting support measure needs to be embedded in training, practice and policy at national and local (municipal level) in the Netherlands. This applies to all types of ECEC (day care, pre-school play groups, first years of primary school) and all population groups – fathers and mothers, all SES groups, native and non-native Dutch population, recognising that low SES groups, including lone parents families can particularly benefit from the parenting support ECEC can offer.

In this regard, **greater recognition in pre-service and in-service training, in practice and policy needs to be given to the fact that good quality ECEC can reduce stress in families' lives and enhance outcomes for children.** Most attention on parent-school partnership relations to date has focussed on formal education (primary and secondary school). The benefits of ECEC services engaging with parents has received lesser attention, despite the fact that it is in earliest years of children's learning and development, that parents have most need for information and support.

It is important to **always keep in mind the multiple functions of and possibilities inherent in ECEC** such as: offering **stimulating learning, development and socialising opportunities** for young children; providing **information to parents on children's learning and development** and stimulating **sharing of information about learning and development at home and ECEC**; **enhancing parents self-esteem as parents**; providing **information to parents on systems of education** particularly **at important transitions**, such as from home to ECEC setting, and from ECEC setting to school; helping parents **reconcile family and work responsibilities**; **linking parents to other support systems in the community**, such as health, housing, training and employment; **linking parents to other informal learning, cultural and leisure amenities in the community** (playground,

library, parks, swimming pool, cultural centres).

This is important for all families but particularly for families living in disadvantaged circumstances, who due to stress and low education, have diminished energy, motivation and or capacities to enjoy and sensitively respond to their children, and stimulate positive attitudes to learning. Given its family support dimension and the fact that ECEC can reduce burdens in parents' lives, **indirectly ECEC has an important preventative function in relation to reducing violence in young children's home lives.**

In this respect, **ECEC should be accessible and affordable for all families with young children.** Additionally, given that parents are young children's primary educators and **most learning takes place in informal settings such as home and neighbourhood, attention needs to be paid to ensuring these learning environments for young children and their parents are also safe and secure, free from discrimination and attractive spaces for families to be with young children.**

With these conclusions in mind, it becomes clear that **working with parents and families needs to be an essential topic of professional development for all early childhood practitioners.** Increased attention needs to be paid to **communicating with parents and working with diverse families.** Knowledge about children's wider family context is important, keeping in mind that young children can learn from brothers and sisters, grandparents and other extended family members as well as parents. One size does not fit all – rather practitioners need to be flexible in how they engage with parents and families and the kind of outreach provided.

In addition, to being in tune with young children's family lives, **ECEC practitioners also need to be knowledgeable about community resources so as to best support parents in stimulating their children's informal learning at home and in the neighbourhood.** Good co-operation between all those involved in these learning spaces, whether at home, in ECEC or in the neighbourhood, will support young children fulfil their potential.

Young children's learning and development takes place in a range of contexts: at home with the family, in non-formal settings in the community, and in formal early childhood education and settings (ECEC). In all of these settings parents have an important contribution to make. The aim of the study is to review recent and current research, policies, strategies and initiatives relating to parental involvement in early learning in the Netherlands. The review is supported with reference to key European developments in this area.

A number of arenas are considered: parental involvement in early learning of their children (0 to 6 years) in the home and neighbourhood context (otherwise described as informal and non-formal learning contexts); parental involvement in early learning of children of 0 – 6 years in institutionalized or formal settings such as day care, pre-school playgroups and the first two years of primary school. Also considered are the interrelationships among and between parents and professionals in support of children's early learning whether at home or in school.

Data and background information for the study has been collected from a number of sources including national and international research literature, national and European policy reports and reviews, informal and formal discussions with experts and key informants at national and international conferences and seminars and specifically arranged face to face meetings. During the period of the study (September 2011 to January 2012) attention has also been paid to how the topic of parental engagement in early learning has been treated in the media.

The report of the study is organised in two parts. Firstly, we provide an overview of the research and policy context nationally and internationally regarding parental involvement in early learning. We will discuss 1) the rationale and aims for parental involvement, 2) definitions and typologies for describing parental involvement in early learning, 3) key research which tell us about the impact of family factors and parental involvement on learning outcomes, 4) the legal and policy basis for parental involvement in the Netherlands, 5) describe the main forms of parental involvement and support for early learning in the Netherlands, their prevalence and key related research, evaluations and effect studies.

In the second part of the study we highlight good practice in the form of case studies of successful and innovative parental involvement programmes and initiatives including programmes and initiatives targeted at disadvantaged families and/or fathers. Here we draw firstly on current and previous Bernard van Leer Foundation supported projects in Flanders and in the Netherlands, paying attention to the outcomes of these projects. Secondly, we include the Pen Green Children and Families Centre in England as an international good practice example. Finally, three current Dutch innovative ECEC initiatives with regard to parental involvement in early learning are described and analysed.

PART 1: RESEARCH AND POLICY CONTEXT ON PARENTS, FAMILIES AND EARLY LEARNING

1.1 Why involve parents in early learning?

Parents are children's primary educators

There is a notable consensus across education policy statements and practice guidelines in many countries that parents are children's first and most enduring educators (OECD, 2012). In recent decades this 'truth' is frequently accompanied with recommendations firstly, about the need to support parents in their parenting, including their role in supporting their children's learning and development. A second focus in policy recommendations concerns strengthening the relationship between the home and the ECEC setting and school in order to enhance children's learning and development. In fact, throughout the international field of ECEC, good communication and co-ordinated partnership between parents and staff is seen as essential to high-quality care and education of young children (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2008; OECD, 2012; Urban, 2009).

Parents and professionals working in partnership benefit children

Invariably the term 'partnership' is used to describe the relationship between parents and ECEC professionals. The principle of 'working in partnership' with parents is now firmly established within national educational policies, including in the Netherlands. Often, the notion of *equal* or coordinated partnership is emphasized, with each party recognizing and valuing the contribution of the other to children's wellbeing. Within such a vision, parents and practitioners are both viewed as experts: parents as experts on their own children and practitioners as experts in caring and educating children in the context of an institution or group setting. Respectful sharing of information between parents and practitioners about children's learning and development at home and at school is viewed as being in children's best interests. Also, partnership involves responsibility on both sides.

In the past decade the notion of *educational partnership* has been prominent in discussions and publications at policy level in the Netherlands. This is defined as the process whereby schools, parents and other services support each other in stimulating children's curiosity, motivation and development (de Wit, 2005). It is up to each children's centre or school to decide their particular aim, motivation and approach to educational partnership (Kalthoff, 2011) once basic legal requirements are fulfilled.

Four general aims or motives for educational partnership have been proposed in the Dutch context: pedagogical, organizational, democratic and enabling (Smit et al. 2006 cited in Kalthoff, 2011). The **Pedagogical aim** involves harmonisation of childrearing and educational approach at home and at school, whereby parents and practitioners/teachers listen respectfully to each other and are open to share knowledge about children. The **Organisational aim** entails parents providing practical help in the organization and implementation of activities in and outside school: such as listening to children read, accompanying classes to swimming pool, library or a museum. It could also involve parents sharing their own talents in school. The **Democratic partnership aim** focuses on giving parents a voice in education whereby parents are active formally and informally in decision-making processes about the school's aims and developments. This also

presupposes respectful listening between school and parents, whereby each other's areas of expertise is acknowledged. The **'Enablement' aim** involves enabling both parents and practitioners to enhance the quality of their mutual relationship for the benefit of children's learning.

ECEC as a parenting support measure

It is recognized internationally that ECEC has an important function in providing parents and care takers with educational and social support in meeting their responsibilities in bringing up their children. ECEC can also contribute to engaging parents with related measures to improve employment, job-related training, parent education and leisure time activities (European Commission, 2011). This is viewed as particularly important in disadvantaged areas (Eurofound, 2010; Council of Europe, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that there is huge overlap between good practice in ECEC and parenting support measures. However, according to the 2009 Eurofound report on developing support to parents through early childhood services, although all European countries provide some form of support to families through services, cash transfers, tax incentives or other benefits, "in most countries there is little organized outreach to parents from early childhood centres or services" (Eurofound, 2010, 1). The OECD has identified that a current challenge for ECEC services is to embrace the crucial role of parents in young children's development and involve them in services as much as possible (OECD, 2012). Engaging families and community is one of five policy levers, which OECD Starting Strong III has identified that are likely to enhance quality in ECEC.

Current policy discourse on parents and early learning

International policy documents, such as the OECD Starting Strong reports (2006; 2012) and UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8, describe the involvement of parents in young children's education as a fundamental right and obligation. Nevertheless patterns of parental and family engagement in ECEC differ from country to country. The following statements, the first from the UK, the second, third and fourth from the Netherlands, are typical of the current policy discourse in these countries:

Cited in Connor and Wheeler, 2009 p.36

"Working with parents as partners is critical for young children's development and learning, which is why highly effective settings and schools work hard to put partnership with parents in practice"

Trouw (15 december 2008) cited in Hogeboom (2009) (Source: Hogeboom (2009) Oogst; School en ouders, partnerschap voor leerling-succes)

"Een kind kan zich niet optimaal ontwikkelen, ook niet op school, als ouders daar niet aan meewerken. Ouders moeten hun verantwoordelijkheid nemen en betrokken zijn bij de school. Een school is gebaat bij betrokken ouders. Je moet als school eisen durven stellen en verwachten dat ouders taken op zich nemen." ("A child does not develop optimally, also not at school if parents are not co-operating. Parents must take their responsibility and be involved in the school. A school benefits if parents are involved. As a school you must dare to demand and expect that parents take on tasks")

Staatssecretaris M. van Bijsterveld

Concept Regeerakkoord, 2010 p.31

"Ouders zijn mede verantwoordelijk (ook financieel) voor de taalontwikkeling van hun kinderen" (Parents are co-responsible (also financially) for the language development of their children)

"Kinderen met een grote taalachterstand gaan met dwang en drang deelnemen aan voor- en vroegschoolse educatie"
(Children who are very much lagging behind in language development will, by force and pressure, participate in pre-school education)

Brief aan Tweede Kamer (Letter to the Second Chamber) cited in interview with the Minister, De Volkskrant 30 November 2011

'Besteed meer tijd aan kinderen, desnoods ten koste van werk'...'Ouders moeten zoveel doen dat ze het idee hebben dat ze voor de volle honderd procent betrokken zijn bij de school' (Spend more time on children, even though this takes time from your work. Parents need to do as much so that they have the idea that they are 100% involved in the school).

Marja van Bijsterveldt, Minister van Onderwijs (Minister of Education)

One of the reasons explaining the strength of these statements is the research evidence from recent longitudinal research studies which link home learning environment, including parenting behaviours and attitudes to children's learning outcomes (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2011; Sheridan et al. 2010). Key factors are a literacy rich home environment, quantity and quality of cognitive stimulation, parental sensitivity and child-centred emotional support and an emphasis on the value of learning.

In other words, parents and what they do have a powerful effect on children's learning. This effect is stronger than ECEC setting or school effects (Desforges et al. 2003).

1.2 Definitions and frameworks for understanding parental involvement

1.2.1 Defining parental involvement

While there appears to be universal support (in principle) for the *notion* of parental involvement in young children's early learning and the inherent value of ECEC services working in partnership with parents, the concepts of parental involvement and partnership can be hazy.

Different definitions, models and traditions underpin practice (Share, Kerrins and Greene, 2011). Adding to the confusion is that fact that the term 'involvement' can be used synonymously with 'participation', 'partnership', 'collaboration' or 'cooperation'. Furthermore, there is no common understanding of its meaning among educators (Whitmarsh, 2009).

Forms of parental involvement, identified by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) in a review of the English language research literature on parental involvement (relating mostly in primary and secondary schools), included the following:

- » good parenting in the home, including: the provision of a secure and stable environment; intellectual stimulation; parent-child discussion; good models of constructive social and educational values; high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship;
- » contact with schools to share information;
- » participation in school events;
- » participation in the work of the school;

» participation in school governance.

These forms of parental involvement also apply in many ECEC services.

Most recently, the all-embracing term *parental engagement* has been used in international literature, although this too is used differently depending on the source. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) use the term to capture learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in-school activities, decision-making and collaborating with the community. In a project focussing on enhancing the school readiness of disadvantaged preschool children in the US, parental engagement is defined as comprising 1) parental warmth and sensitivity, 2) support for a child's emerging autonomy, and 3) active participation in learning (Sheridan et al, 2010).²

Finally, it is important to note the model of partnership, focussing on involvement in school life and supporting children's learning and education as home has been critiqued as classed, gendered and racialised representing a dominant discourse of white, middle-class motherhood (Crozier and Davies, 2007 cited in Whitmarsh, 2007).

1.2.2 Parents and professionals and the balance of power

A number of commentators have pointed to the gap between (national) policy or stakeholder agreements on professionals and parents working in partnership, and the reality at individual setting level (Broekhof, personal communication Sept. 2011; EACEA, 2009; Share et al. 2011; Smit, Driessen and Doesborgh, 2005). There are a number of reasons accounting for this. In the relationships and interactions between parents and professionals, questions of power and the balance of power and the degree of openness to each other's perspective arise. In the 1994 European Network for School-age Childcare (ENSAC) conference on 'Empowering the Parents', Prof. Remi Baekelmans referred to approaches to parental participation as being related to the democratic functioning of society. It's about "openness to defend one's own interests but at the same time show consideration for other people" (Baekelmans, 1994, p. 58). However, clearly this is easier said than done. Ten years later Prott and Hautumm (2004) argued a case for 'co-operation' rather than, or a stepping stone to 'partnership' between parents and services given that in the everyday practice of both groups, parents and practitioners, "mutual contacts may bring about insecurity, anxiety, disappointment and fear, but also delight, appreciation and success" (p.8). Micha de Winter, Professor of Childrearing Issues, University Utrecht, in an interview in de Volkskrant, 10 December 2011, referred to the worsening relations between parents and schools in the Netherlands and the negative impact this has on children (Gerrits, 2011).

International research cited by Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008) has consistently reported that relationships between practitioners and parents are often strained and not always meaningful. Professionals struggle in knowing how best to communicate with parents, are often anxious about it and reluctant to do it. Parents too, are often unsure of their role, both at home and in school, in relation to children's learning (Menheere and Hooge, 2010).

What are the origins of these difficulties? Some authors have referred to the unequal knowledge-power relationship between parents and educators (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2008), especially in contexts of poverty and large immigrant populations. Parents and practitioners may also have

² These three dimensions of parental behaviours have been demonstrated to be highly predictive of children's social-emotional learning and cognitive development (Sheridan et al. 2010).

different understandings and expectations of each other's contribution to children's early learning (Share et al. 2011; Smit et al. 2005). The notion of practitioner as 'expert' invests teacher with power, and thus inhibits partnership relations (Whitmarsh, 2009). Often the voices of parents are not included in the elaboration of ECEC curricula (Vandenbroeck, 2009), including the forms of parental involvement.

A research study by Smit (2005) focussing on the expectations and wishes of non-native and native Dutch parents with respect to primary education in Rotterdam illustrate some of these issues. The findings point on the one hand to satisfaction amongst parents with contacts with teachers and school principals and the extent to which they are kept up to date with school happenings, but on the other hand to parental dissatisfaction regarding the extent to which their views are taken on board. Non-native parents in particular feel that communication is one-sided. A further finding was that topics of discussion and information given by teachers to parents at parent evenings or informal meetings with parents have little influence on child-rearing behaviours at home. The authors conclude that mutual sharing of information regarding children's learning and development between parents and practitioners is not happening (Smit et al. 2005).

Factors accounting for these findings included: a clear separation in the minds of parents between child-rearing at home and education at school; differences in norms and values regarding childrearing and education between (non-native) parents and teachers; cultural differences in communication styles, differences in views regarding respective responsibilities for child-rearing and education and limited abilities in the Dutch language amongst non-native parents.

A further important contributing factor to strained relations between parents and practitioners is the lack of attention given to the skills necessary to work with parents and families in pre-service and in-service training of professionals. An important finding of the EU CORE study about professional competencies and training in ECEC was that many formal professional competence profiles and training profiles focus mainly on knowledge and competences about working with children "neglecting the essential work with parents and local communities" (Vandenbroeck, Urban et al. 2012).

What kinds of solutions have been proposed to improve working relations between parents and educational settings? Some authors point to the necessity of clarifying the overall responsibilities of parents versus schools. According to Epstein, parents ultimately have the responsibility for their children's upbringing and schools remain ultimately responsible for the organisation and the quality of education (Epstein 2001 cited in Menheere et al. 2010). Additionally, according to Smit et al. (2005) authors of the Rotterdam study referred to above, both parents and educators need to acknowledge that they 'need' each other – in order to be better able to communicate about the pedagogical climate at home and at school, so that they can better complement each other's contribution to children's learning and development, and can develop respect for each other's contribution to the childrearing and education of children (Smit et al. 2005).

De Graaff et al (2008) place the emphasis on improving communication and mutual understanding. "For educators, listening to parents more, dealing with language barriers, improving communication, counteracting stereotypes, taking concrete action and learning about family situations seem to be the key aspects for overcoming problems." (De Graaff et al, 2008, 21). Here the responsibility for action is placed squarely on practitioners' shoulders.

In relation to immigrant parents explicitly, Vandenbroeck, Roets and Snoek (2009) make the point that a welcoming early years setting in which staff 'recognise and respect the difference of immigrant mothers explicitly' can support the development of a hybrid or dual identity whereby mothers can draw on values and practices from their culture or origin as well as those from the host country (212, cited in Whitmarsh, 2009).

Between 2010 and 2011 the parent's organisation Boink, and the authors of the early childhood pedagogical framework in the Netherlands (Pedagogisch Kader Kindercentra 0-4 jaar) collaborated in a project, "Pedagogisch Kader voor Ouders" which aimed to make the framework accessible to parents, to explain to parents what they can expect from daycare settings in terms of young children's learning and development, and to provide advice regarding good communication between parents and practitioners. The outcome has been two illustrated publications, one intended for Parent Commissions (Boink, 2011) and one intended for parents of young children (Singer, 2011).

Debate on relationship between home and schools in the Netherlands during 2011 pointed towards the need to formalising an agreement between parents and professionals with respect to responsibilities for supporting learning at the point of enrolment of a child in an ECEC service or school. In such a 'contract', expectations of settings regarding parental engagement could be clearly laid out and parents commit to these as a condition of enrolment.³

³ The notion of written contract between parents and settings with respect to parental responsibilities in supporting children's learning at home and in ECEC setting was proposed by Gjalt Jellesma, director of BOINK at the launch of the research study Diversiteit in Oudercommissies on 26th September 2011, which was conducted by e-Quality and Boink. Similarly, in the workshop on parental involvement het Jonge Kind congress on 1st November 2011, Frederik Smit proposed an 'engagementverklaring' which parents would sign on registration of their child in a service, although he acknowledged that it probably could not have a legal standing. It could include for example a commitment from parents to ensure that children are in bed in time, and have a good breakfast before school. The positive experiences with such a contract from the perspective of the school principal of one school in Utrecht was reported in De Volkskrant 3 Dec 2011 (Stoffelen, 2011).

1.2.3 Using frameworks to critically reflect on and improve parental involvement policies and practice

There have been a number of attempts nationally and internationally to give further structure and meaning to the concept of parental involvement in children's learning, through the development of typologies or frameworks. These serve to critically reflect on and improve parental involvement policies and practice in ECEC. Some examples from the Netherlands are briefly outlined here.

Smit et al. (2008) analytical framework for VVE settings in the Netherlands, which builds on earlier work by De Wit (2005) draws a distinction between three different 'directions' of involvement and four different forms of involvement. The framework consists of 11 cells, the final 12th cell remaining blank, as it would not be expected (nor considered appropriate) for a VVE service to help parents make decisions with regard to the upbringing or education of their child.

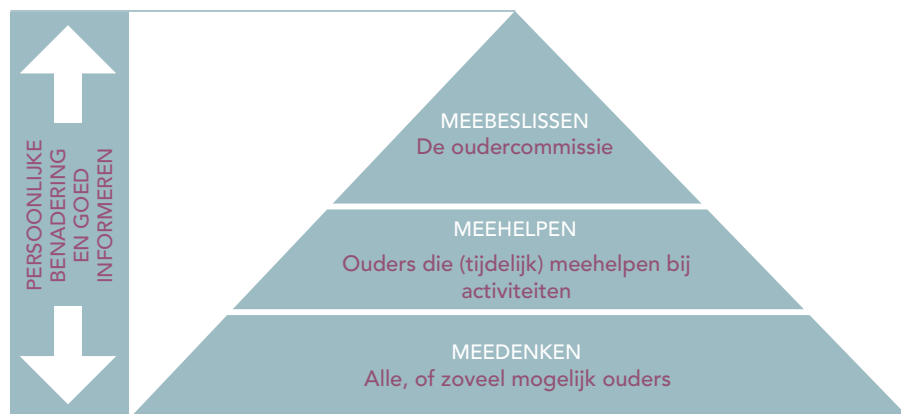
'Mutual involvement: empathizing, helping, thinking along with and helping in decision making'

	Empathising (meeleven)	Helping (meehelpen)	Thinking along with (meedenken)	Joint decision making (meebeslissen)
Parents vis-à-vis offspring				
Parents vis-à-vis group or VVE				
VVE vis-à-vis parents				

Smit, Driessen, van Kuijk, de Wit (2008)

This framework has subsequently been used on the Ouder bij de Les website <http://www.oudersbijdeles.nl/> as a means to provide guidelines and ideas to services in each of the identified categories. A variation of the framework in a pyramid format has also been developed to stimulate involvement of parents in daycare services (De Laat et al, 2011). Here the base of the pyramid is envisaged to involve as many parents as possible in 'Thinking along with/Meedenken', the middle section, includes parents who from time to time help with activities (Meehelpen) and the top of the pyramid (Joint decision making) refers to the few parents who sit on the Oudercommissie.

Pyramid of involvement, in *Diversiteit in de Oudercommissies van de Kinderopvang: Handleiding voor Trainers*, de Laat, van Egten, Duesmann-Oosterlaan (2011) p. 19



The Bernard van Leer Foundation supported 'Parents and Diversity' project also adapted De Wit's framework to assess the awareness of diversity in parental participation in ECEC in the Netherlands (De Graaff and van Keulen, 2008). In the course of this action research project, the same four dimensions, 'living together', 'working together', 'thinking together' and 'taking decisions together' were crossed in a matrix form against six diversity objectives (which were based on DECET's objectives).⁴ The outcome was a completed matrix, containing 30 actions judged most important by participating practitioners, for promoting parental participation and respect for diversity (see also Parents and Diversity Case Study Part 2).

In concluding this section it is worth reiterating the importance of good communication in building learning relationships. Both parents and practitioners may need support to make these learning partnerships work. As MacNaughton and Hughes (2008) advise, "Building partnerships with parents doesn't just happen – it needs to be actively worked on over time" (p.94). The frameworks described have been designed specifically, to stimulate services to critically reflect on how they can go about building respectful relationships with parents. (See also Appendix 1 for summary of *Pre-requisites and success factors for optimal partnership between parents and ECEC services* drawn from a range of national and international projects and initiatives; Smit et al's *Stappenplan optimaliseren ouderbetrokkenheid in de Voor- en Vroegschoolse Educatie*, 2009 and YouTube animation film 'Ouders en School: hoe werk je samen' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbOoRPG-rkA>).

⁴ ECEC services and communities where everyone: 1) feels that he/she belongs; 2) is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity; 3) can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries; 4) can participate as active citizens; 5) actively addresses bias through open communication and willingness to grow; 6) works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination (DECET, 2007).

1.3 What does research tell us about parents' and families' role in learning outcomes?

1.3.1 Background to the literature review

Given the increased attention in educational and social policy to research-based evidence of success, a number of comprehensive research reviews of impact of parental involvement and parent support in early learning have been published in the past decade. Much of this research is based on longitudinal cohort studies where attempts have been made to isolate factors which positively or negatively affect children's outcomes. It is noteworthy that cognitive outcomes (especially language and literacy), and social emotional outcomes (especially behaviours and attitudes) are given priority in this research. Also the vast majority of research refers to child outcomes from aged 3 years onwards, with most attention on the primary school years (typically 5 years and upwards). While there are many clear trends and consistent findings, there are also a number of conflicting pieces of evidence. Additionally, there is some disagreement on how research findings should be translated into policy and practice. In this section we draw in particular on the evidence cited in the following research reports, meta-analyses and briefs:

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003); Carpentieri et al. (2011); Goodman and Gregg (2010); Hartas (2010, 2011; Menheere and Hooze (2010); Siraj-Blatchford, I., Mayo, A., Melhuish, E., Taggart, B., Sammons, P. and Sylva, K (2011).

1.3.2 Impact of family factors, and 'at home good parenting' on learning outcomes

One of the most frequently cited literature reviews on parental involvement is the 2003 review prepared by Desforges et al. (2003). The review concludes that the extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity. Parents' perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it, is also influential.

The most important finding of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment. Furthermore, in the primary school age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools.

Desforges et al. conclude that parental involvement 'works' through the indirect influence of parenting in shaping the child's self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations. Other researchers have similarly focussed on identifying the key capabilities that parents bring to supporting their children's learning and education. Lee and Bowen identify three forms of parental capabilities: 1. personal dispositions (sensitivity, warmth, attitudes towards learning); 2: access to education resources and services and 3: access to education-related institutions (Lee and Bowen, 2006 cited in Hartas, 2010).

Parents attitudes to learning was also one of the key factors found in the case studies of the *Effective Provision of Pre-school, Primary and Secondary*

Education (EPPSE 3-16) study (Blatchford et al. 2011), which explored why certain children 'succeed against the odds' (i.e. low SES families) while others fall further behind. In the homes of children 'succeeding against the odds':

- » Parents engaged their young children in learning processes, reading with them, providing them with educational (computer) games and materials, talking to them about school and learning and engaged in other joint activities (e.g. cooking together).
- » They valued these activities as opportunities to develop cognitive skills that prepared the child for school; and believed experiences helped them develop positive attitude to, and interest for, school related activities
- » Child-centred emotional support was also found to be important and parents reinforced high standards for behavior and academic aspirations for children and explicitly expressed their high esteem for education.

The significance for child outcomes, of what parents 'do' at home, as well as their background was also highlighted in the Millenium Cohort Study in the UK. This study showed that aspects of the early childhood caring environment explain around one quarter of the cognitive gap between the poorest and richest children at the age of 3, with differences in the home learning environment (HLE) playing the biggest role. In this study HLE was measured by parents reading to child; taking child to library, help child learning abc, teaching child numbers, counting, songs, rhymes; child painting, drawing at home.

Important to note, however, is that differences in family background factors, such as mother's age, parental education and family size together explained a much bigger proportion of the gap in cognitive outcomes at age 3. Furthermore, a third of the cognitive gap remains unexplained by any of the observable characteristics measured in this study (Dearden, Sibieta and Sylva, 2010).

1.3.3 Intergenerational perspectives on learning outcomes

Another cohort study, the British Cohort Study, which tracked families over two generations provides further light on this reasons for the unexplained gap. The main finding is that there is a very strong correlation between the cognitive development of parents during their own childhood (in this case parents born in April 1970) and that of their children (aged about 6 in 2004). This connection remains, even after taking environmental factors into account suggesting an inherited genetic component to cognitive abilities. Other factors identified by the study as showing particularly strong intergenerational transmission include:

- » Attitudes to education: the child thinks that good marks in school are very important, and the parent thinks that university is likely;
- » Home learning/reading: the parent reads stories to the child every day (pre-school) (p.44)

1.3.4 Parents engagement in children's language and literacy

One area of development which research has consistently found a positive

link between parenting behaviours and involvement is verbal language and reading (Dearing et al. 2006; Patall et al. 2007 and Merlo et al. 2007 cited in Menheere et al. 2010). Hartas' (2010) analysis of data from Millenium Cohort Study to assess the impact of family social background factors on social adjustment and on language and literacy at 7 years revealed that family income and mother's educational qualifications had a modest to moderate effect on social adjustment and moderate to strong effects on language and literacy. Interestingly, the frequency of parental engagement with home learning activities was not found to contribute to teacher ratings of children's language and literacy at age 7. However, mother-child emotional closeness and mother's (own) reading made substantive contributions to teacher-rated language and literacy (Hartas, 2011). This study, like others (Dearing et al. 2004; Patall et al. 2007) showed that homework support given by parents is not a significant factor in terms of child outcomes in language and mathematics.

1.3.5 Implications for policy

One of the outcomes of these findings have been the promotion of policy approaches which focus on improving home learning environment, noting that this does not just entail transmitting reading and numeracy skills but rather creating literacy-rich home environments where the value of learning is emphasised. A second policy approach focuses on helping children and parents from poor families believe that their own actions and efforts can lead to higher educational outcomes.

Given the complexity of the issue, particularly in relation to reducing the educational gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children Hartas writes (with respect to UK policy on parental involvement), "to approach parental involvement as the panacea for making up for the effects of socio-economic inequality is overly simplistic and potentially misleading. Offering an idealized construction of parenthood in which what parents do with their children, regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, is a key determinant to their educational advancement and social-emotional wellbeing shifts the debate from supporting parents accessing genuine educational and training opportunities to moralizing about them by holding them responsible for their children's academic and social difficulties". (Hartas, 2010, p. 17)

A multi-dimensional systemic approach offers a promising solution particularly when addressing the needs of children and families living in disadvantaged circumstances. An EACEA review of the literature regarding ECEC and tackling social and cultural inequalities in Europe concluded that the **most effective programmes are the so called 'combination' approaches, which involve intensive, early starting, child-focussed, centre-based education together with strong parental involvement, parent education, programmed educational home activities and measures of family support** (Leseman in EACEA, 2009).

The OECD Research Brief "Parental and Community Engagement Matters" similarly highlights the benefits of a combination approach: "since ECEC settings provide services for a range of people with different backgrounds, not every strategy or type of engagement meets all needs or is suitable for each child, family or community" (OECD, 2012: 9).

In this regard, the recommendations of the European Economic and Social Committee on ECEC (January 2010) are also relevant:

1.8 The needs of families and children living in disadvantaged, remote areas and regions should be addressed better and in a more complex way, including community involvement and public support. The different forms of services – integrated, home based, parent support etc. – can respond to differences in the needs of children and their families.

1.4 Current national policy in the Netherlands

As stated earlier the notion of an educational partnership between schools, parents and other services is a topical policy issue in the Netherlands. The government policy in 2011 emphasised joint responsibility between formal educational institutions and parents for language and literacy development. The focus on improved performance in language and literacy reflects the priorities which have been set out in the government's Quality Agenda for Primary Education (Opiniepeiling Kwaliteitsagenda eindrapport).

In 2010 the *Education Council*, an independent advisory body that advises government (ministers and ministries) and parliament ('Eerste & Tweede Kamer'), published the report 'Parents as partners' in response to a parliamentary request for advice on improving parental involvement in education (Onderwijsraad, 2010). The council draws a distinction between three kinds of relationships between parents and schools: 1) the individual, legal relation (parents as rights bearers and duty holders), 2) parents as 'cooperation partners' in terms of upbringing and education of their children, and 3) parents as part of a (informal) parent community. In its report, the council advised that greater emphasis be placed on the second and third type of relationship, arguing that the legal position of parents is already sufficiently solid (see Box 1 below for more details).

Drawing on previous studies, the council concludes that **there is little meaningful partnership between schools and parents**, despite schools generally having met all the legal requirements such as setting up participation councils. To establish 'real' partnership, the council advises greater attention be paid to developing the *conditions* for meaningful partnership, namely structure, culture, willingness and skills. The council places responsibility for this 'developmental work' largely with schools and parents, and not with government or municipalities.⁵

A strong parent community is viewed as a means to support not only the upbringing and education of children but also social cohesion. In relation to stimulating the (informal) parent community, the Council advises that responsibility for parent-to-parent initiatives remain with parents, but that schools can be stimulated to play a supportive role in the set up and ensuring sustainability of networks/ groups etc.

⁵One example of an initiative to support such development work is the guidelines developed by Smit, Driessen and de Wit (2009) for VVE services to optimise parental involvement. The step by step plan is designed to guide practitioners through a 6-phase process encompassing a needs analysis, the development of a vision, elaboration of an action plan, implementation, and evaluate activities and skills and attitudes of practitioners are intended to inspire and give concrete suggestions to practitioners.

Box 1: The legal position of parents with respect to formal primary education

The **Wet Medezeggenschap op Scholen (WMS)/Act on Participation⁶ in Schools** provides the framework for - compulsory - 'representative advisory councils' (*medezeggenschapsraden*) in primary and secondary education schools. The Act was designed to ensure democratic involvement of (secondary) learners, staff and parents in policy development and governance at primary and secondary level. Practitioner members are elected from and by practitioners, whilst caregiver members are elected from and by caregivers. The Act furthermore states (article 7.1, 7.2) that the representative advisory council should strive to promote openness and consultation in the school, guard against discrimination and support equal treatment (of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people in particular). The representative advisory council receives a budget to carry out its work. The council has the right to approval (*instemmingsrecht*) and the right to advise on a range of issues (respectively, articles 10 and 11). With regard to its 'approval right', a school needs to gain approval of the participation council in relation to among other issues, changes in educational goals of the school, changes in school regulations, and changes to rules with regard to for instance, health and safety in the school. With regard to the right to advise, a council is given the opportunity to advise the school on matters such as changes to school time tables, modifications of overall long term (multi-year) financial policy, appointment or dismissal of school management, and changes to policy with regard to accepting and removing of learners. In addition to parents' rights (and duty) to partake in the advisory council, under the act they are also obliged to ensure their children attend school regularly (*leerplicht*); as well as having the right to information about their children's progress at school (*recht op informatie*), the right to be informed about school's policies and programmes and policy on quality, and the right to participate in the schools' parent representation group (*ouderraad*). This generally deals with less formal school issues, such as celebrations and parent information evenings.

The rights and responsibilities of parents of children attending ECEC services such as daycare centres, pre-schools and playgroups have a weaker legal basis (personal communication, Jellesma, 2011 – Boink-eQuality seminar). Nevertheless, amongst the provisions of the **Wet Kinderopvang** (2005), or **Childcare Law**, is the obligation on all childcare organizations to have in place a parents' representative group (in Dutch: *Oudercommissies*) for each location.⁷ Parent representative groups have the right to advise on issues such as the quality of care, opening times and prices charged by organizations.⁸ It is up to each parent organization to agree with the childcare organization on their way of working (the number of members, how they are chosen, length of time they sit on the group). A central parent representative group is recommended in the case of larger childcare organizations. On 11 November 2011, Minister Henk Kamp (Social Affairs) announced the establishment of a complaints body for parents of children attending day care settings. He also noted by the end of 2012 parents should be able to access information about prices and quality in all daycare services via the digital *Kinderopvangkaart* an initiative of the parents' organisation BOINK.

The two pieces of legislation which are significant for educational policy at municipal level are Lokale Educatieve Agenda (LEA) (Local Educational Agenda) and Wet OKE Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie' (see box 2 below for summary). Neither elaborate parental involvement in any detail. However, in a letter to parliament on 29th November 2011, Minister for Education, Marja Bijsterveld announced extra financial support

⁶ N.b. the term medezeggenschap refers to having a say, having a voice (in decision-making processes). Although the notion of participation does as such not fully cover the meaning of medezeggenschap, it is used here as a form of shorthand.

⁷ Provisions regarding the role and setting up of Parental Representative Groups are set out in Section 3, Paragraph 3, Articles 1.58 to 1.60a of the Childcare Act 2005.

⁸ Provisions regarding the role and setting up of Parental Representative Groups are set out in Section 3, Paragraph 3, Articles 1.58 to 1.60a of the Childcare Act 2005.

to improve quality for VVE for the 37 largest municipalities. Included in the announcement were measures to strengthen parental involvement, acknowledging the contribution parents make to children's learning within the home context.

Box 2: Lokale Educatieve Agenda (LEA) Local Educational Agenda

The Local Educational Agenda was introduced at municipality level to give form and content to the changes introduced to the Onderwijsachterstandenbeleid (Educational Disadvantage Policy) in 2006. It is an instrument for municipalities, school managements and other partners to work collaboratively together at local level in respect of education policies and policies relating to children and youth. One of the topics on the LEA is parental involvement (in education).

The **Wet OKE (Ontwikkelingskansen door Kwaliteit en Educatie'** /Act for development opportunities through quality and education), in force since August 2010, stipulates that municipalities are responsible for ensuring that all children and particularly those who 'need' it have access to good quality ECEC (understood as VVE programmes). It harmonizes the inspection/regulatory and quality requirements for daycare and pre-school playgrounds and the costs to parents for VVE (whatever the type of service VVE is delivered in). Areas of co-operation include: pedagogical policy and quality, use of space and materials, personnel and in-service training, co-operation with schools, Centres for youth and family (Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin), Care and Advice Teams (Zorg en Advies Teams, ZATs), and neighbourhood. It is viewed by many as a first step towards a more integrated provision for all young children in integrated Children's Centres (Kindcentra).

What about policy and legislation relating to supporting informal and non-formal learning?

Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning (Wmo) (2007) (Support for Social Participation Act) ensures that everyone in the community, particularly those most vulnerable have the possibility of services such as social work, pre-school playgroups, community centres and women's refuge centres. Each municipality is responsible for devising and implementing services and actions under Wet MO. With regard to support to parents, the Act defines 'maatschappelijke ondersteuning' as including preventive support to parents experiencing difficulties with the upbringing of their children (article 1.1.g.2). Municipalities are not responsible for delivering support services directly but outsource to welfare organizations.

The arguably, up to now, minimal support to parental involvement in informal and non-formal parenting and learning can be understood in the broader context of the withdrawal of national government from the informal/non-formal to the formal sphere (Carpentieri, 2011). According to some commentators, this shift is underpinned by a belief that government can exert greater control over learning outcomes in formalized education settings, such as schools and day care centres (personal communication, Kees Broekhof, Sept 2011). The additional support to municipalities, announced November 2011, to promote parental involvement in early learning may mark a shift in this regard (see Appendix 2 for full text of letter from Minister for Education, Culture and Science).

Furthermore, Centres for Children and Family (Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin,

CJG), which by the end of 2011 should exist in all municipalities, are intended to provide easily accessible child-rearing and ECEC information and referrals to more specialized and targeted support and services where needed. However, there is huge variety across 431 municipalities in how Centres for Children and Family operate in practice and the extent to which they engage all parents in the community (see Case Studies in the Netherlands for further information, Part 2). Also of note is the announcement in November 2011, by Minister for Education, Marja van Bijsterveld of a Special Professorship on parental involvement.

In closing this section on government policy on parental involvement it is worth referring to the emotive response, early December 2011, to the Minister's call to (working) parents to invest more time in the learning of their children including their involvement in school. Below is the final paragraph of a piece posted by the editors of the Ouders.nl website which captures the tone of the public response:

Borgdorff (2011)

Ouders en school - Dossier ouderbetrokkenheid

2 december 2011

De oproep van minister van Bijsterveldt voor meer betrokkenheid is veel ouders in het verkeerde keelgat geschoten. Martine Borgdorff analyseert de volkswoede. Juf Marja hoeft je toch niet serieus te nemen?

Ouderbetrokkenheid volgens juf Marja

...Dat de brief van juf Marja zo'n open zenuw blootlegt, is wél interessant. Ouders, en dan vooral de werkende, voelen zich miskend. En dat laten ze horen. Ze buffelen, balanceren en multitasken zich suf, ze laveren tussen reorganisaties, files en ouderavonden, en krijgen als dank te horen dat ze niet betrokken zijn bij hun kind. En of ze verplicht ook nog even willen letten op het voorlezen en rekenen.

Na andere betuttelende, belerende en wantrouwende beleidsmaatregelen – zoals het DDJGZ (voorheen EKD), de CJG's, en de vragenlijsten Stevig Ouderschap – én een reeks aan bezuinigingen op kinderopvang en onderwijs die het ouders en kinderen alleen maar lastiger maken, is dit het zoveelste bewijs dat je als gezin van onze overheid niets hoeft te verwachten.

1.5 Forms of parental involvement in the Netherlands

One of the aims of this study was find out more about the range of parental involvement in early learning in the Netherlands. Specifically: What are the predominant forms?; Who is doing what?; How are parents supported in their childrearing and educating role?; What programmes, initiatives and interventions exist? And What does research tell us about these?

This scoping exercise was conducted primarily through desk based research and discussions with key informants. Unlike much research on this area which tends to focus either on parental involvement in ECEC and school settings, or child-rearing behaviours and parenting support – we kept the parameters wide and included both parenting support structures, and mechanisms and parental involvement in:

» informal learning and non-formal learning *at home* and *in the community*

- » *formal centre-based ECEC settings* (day care, pre-school playgroups (PSZ), pre-schools
- » *in primary school settings*

The data collected are organised in tabular format and are to be found in Appendix 3. Here we summarise the main trends and findings.

1.5.1 What parenting support services are available to parents of young children?

An overall finding is that there is a wide variety of child-rearing support and early learning advice which parents of young children can potentially tap into. This could be informal advice and sharing of experiences with extended family, friends, or in informal parent networks linked to preschool, school or playgrounds. Another possibility available to parents is to discuss issues with staff in their local Centre for Children and Family (Centra voor Jeugd En Gezin) and Baby and Child Health Clinic (Consultatie Bureau), or with staff in the daycare centre, pre-school playgroup or school, which their child attends.

A further source of information and support is attendance at organised parenting classes, such as *Triple P* or *Opvoeden & Zo* or the *Gordon Training* for parents on effective communication with children. Parenting advice websites or discussion fora such as Ouders online provide yet another possibility.

Whilst it is acknowledged that parents differ greatly regarding the kind of interaction and support they need (van de Hoek and Pels, 2008), closer analysis of the data indicates that not all the forms of support or advice referred to above are accessible all groups of parents. According to Gezinsrapport 2011, parents report that they are more likely to seek child-rearing support and advice from their child's daycare centre, pre-school and school, than from the Centre for Children and Family (Centra voor Jeugd En Gezin) and Baby and Baby and Child Health Clinic (Consultatie Bureau), school doctor or social work services. These latter services typically involve telephone calls, waiting times, appointments in contrast with the more immediate, personal face to face contact parents can have with ECEC practitioners in daycare settings, pre-schools or playgroups.

In general, low educated parents and unemployed parents receive relatively little informal support from family and friends, compared to middle and higher educated and working parents. Research indicates that it is these groups of parents who are in most need of support if their young children are to thrive.

1.5.2 Reaching families most in need of parenting and early learning support

The quantity and quality of cognitive stimulation and parental sensitivity, is related to positive child development. These parenting behaviours are generally lower in ethnic minority families and lower educated parents. This is due to family stress, linked in turn to socio-economic disadvantage (Mesman, 2010).

On ongoing challenge for local authorities is to reach families of young children experiencing most stress and who have diminished energy and

motivation and confidence in their parenting capacities. Typically, attention to parenting and child-rearing support via home visiting parenting support programmes, mothers groups or parent and toddler groups and parenting classes has primarily focussed on disadvantaged or at risk groups, including low educated parents, ethnic minority groups lone parents and young mothers.

These initiatives are financed by national government who allocate funds to municipalities (primarily under Wet WMO), who in turn outsource to welfare organisations for implementation. However, coverage is very uneven and in 2012 such initiatives are under-pressure due to budgetary cuts at national and local government level.

Examples of targeted home-visiting parenting support programmes, which aim at enhancing knowledge, skills and confidence of parents of young children include: *Voorzorg*, which is intended for young, low educated women pregnant with first child; *Stevig Ouderschap*, a primary prevention programme against maltreatment for parents of children up to 1.5 years; *Moeders Informeren Moeders (MIM)*, for first time mothers of children 0-18 months and *Home Start*, in families where at least one child is under 6 years. Home based programmes with a specific attention on language and literacy development and stimulation of play and interaction between parents and young children include *Instapje* (1 year olds); *Opstap* (2 – 4 year-olds); *VVE Thuis*; *Jij Bent Belangrijk* and *Boekenpret*. Some of these work as combination home-based and centre based programmes. However, coverage of these programmes is also uneven. In 2012, Nij estimate that 58 municipalities support *Opstap*, 11 *Instapje* and 15 *VVE Thuis*. An estimated 4,000 to 5,000 families currently access these programmes.

1.5.3 What do we know about parental involvement in early learning in ECEC and school settings?

As noted in Section 1.1 four motives or goals for parental involvement in education have been identified for the Dutch context. Briefly, 1) *Pedagogical*: the harmonisation of childrearing and education at home and at school; 2) *Organisational*: parents providing practical help; 3) *Democratic*: giving parents a voice in decision-making practices; 4) *enablement*: enhancing the quality of mutual relationships between parents and practitioners.

There is no national monitoring data regarding parental involvement in centre-based ECEC settings such as pre-school playgroups, daycare settings or pre-schools. Any data available is based on small-scale localised research. Dutch research already cited in Section 1.2.2 has pointed to the lack of harmonisation between child-rearing and education at home and in ECEC and school settings, and the need to improve communication between parents and practitioners. Research conducted by eQuality and Boink regarding parental involvement in daycare settings focussed specifically on organisational and democratic aims of parental involvement. Recommendations arising from this research included the need to approach parents personally about becoming involved in daycare centres and secondly, subdividing oudercommissies into an activity and events group and governance group (De Laat et al. 2011).

The most recent parental involvement monitor relating to primary schools indicates high parental involvement in some aspects of learning. For example, 75% of parents report that they are active at least one year in

helping out in school events, 96% of parents report that schools inform them about learning progress of their children and 84% of primary schools have an ouderraad. Involvement in other areas would seem to be much less common: 32% of primary schools have consultation groups made up of parents and 50% of parents report reading aloud at least once per week to their child (Kans et al. 2009).

In recent years there have been a number of initiatives - printed and online guidelines, handbooks, in-service workshops, film material, online discussion fora - to support ECEC services and schools to enhance parental involvement, and to develop conditions for and improve learning partnerships between parents and ECEC services and schools. These have been developed by knowledge and advice centres such as Sardes, Expertise Centre Ouders, School en Buurt/ITS, and Mutant.

Despite these initiatives, some academic researchers speak about worsening relations and little meaningful participation between parents and schools, to the detriment of children.

The case studies of good practice which follow in Part 2 of the report provide further insight into the dynamics of parental involvement in early learning and what works.

PART 2: CASE STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Community involvement in ECEC facilitates the provision of comprehensive services for children and families i.e. expanded services and possibilities for referrals, and a space for partnership and participation of parents, responding to what children actually need in terms of their overall development (OECD, 2012). In the selection of case studies that are described in this part of the report, attention was paid to including examples which illustrated a 'continuum of services' for young children and their families, whereby formal and non-formal centre based ECEC services worked collaboratively with home based services, social and health services and adult education and other local stakeholders.

2.1 Outcomes and learning about parental involvement in Early Learning from Bernard van Leer Foundation supported projects and initiatives

Bernard van Leer Foundation has a long history of supporting partners and initiatives in the Netherlands who work to enable parents' engagement in the early learning of their children. Parent focussed programmes and interventions which the Foundation supported in 1980s, and 1990s include: *Moeders informeren Moeders* (MIM) (Mothers inform Mothers), *Samen Starten* (Starting Together), and *Samenspel*. In 2011, these programmes are still in operation (see Section 1.5).

More recent BvLF supported partners' projects and initiatives in Flanders and the Netherlands, which focus on parents' engagement in early learning are described below.

VBJK, Flanders

VBJK, the Training, Resource and Research Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ghent, has a long history of working innovatively with parents. VBJK is a good example of an NGO, which has successfully forged strong links with practitioners, parents, community services, government agencies and university research departments. Since its establishment in 1979, the Bernard van Leer Foundation has funded or co-funded a number of VBJK's projects and initiatives. Fostering openness and partnership with parents, within the context of improving quality of ECEC has been a focus from the outset. In 1986, the Flemish governmental agency Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) recognised this strength and requested VBJK to give priority to improving contact between services and parents. Over the years this has been achieved, with support of VBJK's sister organisation the VCOK (Training Centre for ECEC) through: developing training and organising hundreds of training events emphasising the importance of involving parents in the pedagogy of day-care centres all around Flanders; stimulating parent meetings and social events with parents in services; researching and producing a substantial amount of visual and written documentation – books, handbooks, articles, brochures, the magazine KIDDO and video films many of which have been translated or subtitled; collaborating internationally and participating in networks such as ENSAC (European Network for School-Age Childcare), IFDCO (International Family Day Care Organisation), DECET, Children in Europe, Men in Childcare, and in European projects such as NOW (New Opportunities for Women). In all of these activities, VBJK has given particular attention to disadvantaged families and immigrant families.

The position of fathers in child-rearing and education has been a particular interest and area of expertise. In 2006 in collaboration with the Pedagogische Begeleidingsdienst, in the city of Ghent and Flora, Gender Consulting and Training, Brussels, VBJK produced guidelines and a monitoring instrument to support ECEC services to critically reflect on the level of fathers' involvement in ECEC. Key moments and activities in ECEC in which parents, including fathers have an important role to play were identified. One set of activities focus on the individual family-ECEC service contact such as: Intake meetings, settling in periods, daily contacts at arrival and going home time, custom satisfaction discussions, advice and support meetings. The second set focuses on how to more actively involve parents as a group to enhance connections and sharing between two worlds of young children: home and ECEC setting. Suggested initiatives are: occasional informal activities such as open door days, breakfasts for parents and children, theme evenings as well as involving parents in leading and supporting daily group activities: singing, reading, dancing, cooking with children, accompanying group on a walk in the neighbourhood, providing introductory tours to new parents, translating or interpreting for parents. The actions and projects on parents have had an important impact on the policy of the Flemish government. New legislation has been developed to strengthen the parents who live in difficult situations: 20% of the childcare place are reserved for those parents. The governmental organisation Kind en Gezin has also emphasised the important role of men in ECEC and the number of male workers has increased from 1.1% to 3.4%.

<http://www.vbjk.be>

Bureau Mutant: Parents and Diversity

Bureau Mutant, a partner of the Bernard van Leer Foundation since early 2000s supports ECEC professionals and institutions through innovative methods, action research and training. One of Mutant's focus areas has been in improving quality of care and education through working positively with parents, particularly in the context of services meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population of parents and children. The BvLF supported project *Parents and Diversity Research and Training Project* (2003 to 2006) gave concrete form to the theoretical framework, 'experiencing together, acting together, reflecting together and deciding together' with reference to six diversity objectives, which were based on DECET's objectives.⁹ The outcome was a completed matrix, containing 30 actions judged most important by the participating practitioners, for promoting parental participation and respect for diversity.

The project also analysed the perspectives of practitioners and parents in five childcare organizations regarding the partnership between them. Findings show that contact between parents and practitioners were generally positive although discussions about difficulties children were having, were often experienced as problematic. Furthermore, concerns of parents and practitioners were sometimes diametrically opposed. For example, when it was practitioners aim to get information from parents to help explain why a child's development was delayed, parents' priorities were to find out things from the practitioner to enable them to entrust their children to their care. The most frequent topics of discussion between parents and practitioners were: centres' daily programmes, dealing with sick children, nappy changing, playing outside and the balance between stimulating development and offering children a safe environment. In this and the subsequent phase of the project, *Diversity and Parental Involvement* (2004-2006), training and methodologies for practitioners and managers of ECEC services were developed

⁹ ECEC services and communities where everyone: feels that he/she belongs; is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her identity; can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries; can participate as active citizens; actively addresses bias through open communication and willingness to grow; works together to challenge institutional forms of prejudice and discrimination (DECET, 2007).

to improve pedagogical quality on the basis of respect for diversity and parental involvement.

A number of supporting publications, handbooks and training courses have been developed as a result of this project. The training course 'Open doors for parents' has been provided to all childcare workers, coordinators and managers in the Municipality of the Hague. A related output is an arts based training methodology for equal opportunities in the cooperation with parents 'De Kunstkar' (The Art Cart). This training has been nationally accredited and has been provided to all 150 childcare centres of Child Care Humanitas. Unresolved questions in the *Parents and Diversity* projects were a starting point for the *Sustainable Change Project* (2007 – 2009) which addressed: How to anchor the insights and methods of cooperation with parents within childcare provider organizations? And how to create a sustainable learning process with professionals? Outputs of this project include instruments and learning approaches, publications and handbooks which support practitioners to be critically reflective with colleagues regarding their daily work with children and families. BKK views the methodology as a framework for ECEC services in the Netherlands as 'Learning Organisations' and the methodology was presented at 5 regional conferences organized by BKK for (5 x 100) 5000 participants in 2010, and in 5 conferences during October and November 2011.

<http://www.mutant.nl>

Stichting Pedagogieontwikkeling 0-7 (P0-7) – SPOREN

The original aim of Stichting Pedagogieontwikkeling 0-7 (P0-7), which was established in 1995 in Amsterdam, was to develop a new pedagogy for children 0 to 7 years in the Netherlands, in which young children and their parents had a strong voice. In time, P0-7 became the means by which the internationally recognised Reggio Emilia approach to ECEC could be translated and interpreted for the Dutch context. The outcome has been SPOREN (Stichting Pedagogieontwikkeling Reggio Emilia Netherlands), translated in English as 'Traces'. Sporen is now officially accredited as VVE Programme.

Within the SPOREN approach equal attention is given to working with teachers, children and parents – in fact parents are viewed as vital and not to be missed contributors to the education of young children. All three participants, teachers, children and parents are stimulated to develop an explorative attitude. The pedagogical development work in the schools incorporates research, environmental design, practice, documentation, and reflection. Parents are drawn into the everyday happenings in the children's centres on a daily basis – here the pedagogical documentation is vital. Practitioners connect everything with the parents, so they can follow it, add something to it or co-operate. Importantly, the content is open and is led by what is relevant for the children and their immediate social context. In this way the children's centres are viewed as learning communities for parents as well as children and practitioners.

Currently Sporen is implemented in Childcare Centre De Platanen in Amsterdam. BvLF is currently financially supporting the piloting of SPOREN in 4 different settings in different regions in the Netherlands. P0-7 has also developed in-service training programmes which prepares and supports practitioners to work with the SPOREN. Other activities include membership of the International Reggio Emilia Network, organization of study tours from the Netherlands to Reggio Emilia, writing of articles and conference presentations.

2.2 International good practice

Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families

Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families (Pen Green) attracts national and international attention for its innovative ways of working with parents and families. The Centre, located in Corby, a working class district in the English midlands with high unemployment and a large number of multi-problem families, was established as a community service for families with young children in 1983. Today it comprises a Baby Nest (for children up to 2 years), a Nursery and Creche (for children 2 to 5 years) and after-school and holiday play scheme for children 4 to 11 years and applied research and training programmes in the Pen Green *Integrated Research, Development and Training Base and Leadership Centre*.

At the heart of Pen Green's programming is a community development approach which recognises the need for a balance of power in respectful relationships with parents. Critically parents, practitioners, referred to as *family workers*, and children are all considered as active learners. Pen Green's parental involvement framework known as *Parental Involvement in Children's Learning* or *PICL*, was developed through a research project in 1997 – 2000 during which parents and family workers worked together to find a range of successful models of engagement. The approach combines action for the parent (helping parents to reclaim their own education and build up their self-esteem) and action for children (encouraging parents to child-watch, to be involved in and respectful of their children's learning process and development). It's a way of working which involves respecting the knowledge of parents about their own children and working with parents in a 'knowledge sharing approach'. The roles of professional knowledge and parents' experience are seen as complementary and equally important. There is a basic understanding that all parents care for their children and are deeply committed if given the opportunity.

In practice this means lots of contact and communication between children's home and the Centre. Parents learn about the key theoretical frameworks which influence Pen Green's daily work such as *Wellbeing; Involvement and Schemas*. The approach also involves sharing pedagogical strategies that adults use to help children learn both at home and in the Centre. Examples of these strategies include, affirmation of the child through facial expression and physical closeness or encouraging children to make choices and decisions or adults encouraging children to go beyond the adults' own knowledge base and accompany them into new experience.

Family workers visit children at home, and parents are actively encouraged to visit the Centre - to share information and learning about their own children with the Key Family Worker or to participate in the many workgroups, courses and activities which are organised for fathers and mothers. Parents are also encouraged to work as volunteers in the messy play area – and some parent volunteers go on to become family workers themselves.

A portfolio of documentation about each child: notes, observations, children's drawings, photographs, is built up over time, to which both parents and key family workers contribute to. The analysis of videos recorded family workers in the Centre and by parents at home is also an important catalyst for knowledge sharing and research. A more formal sharing and

analysing of information takes place three times a year during which staff and parents come together to discuss the child's learning and development in all areas. The children's portfolio are key in these discussions.

Many of the groups, which focus on a wide range of parenting and personal development topics are open to all families in the neighbourhood – meaning that Pen Green is a hive of activity during the day, at evenings and even at weekends, when the Dads Group and Father Infant Massage group meet.

Sources: <http://www.pengreen.org/>; Whalley (2007); Discussions with Ass. Prof. Elly Singer regarding her study visits to Pen Green Children's Centre during 2011.

2.3 Three case studies in the Netherlands

The following more indepth case studies describe three current initiatives illustrating different challenges and opportunities when engaging parents in early learning in the Netherlands. The first case study, based on a project in Rotterdam focuses on the role of the parent counsellor in engaging parents of toddlers and primary school going children in the learning of their children in order to combat educational disadvantage. The second case study describes a city wide initiative in Eindhoven which aims to strengthen the pedagogical infrastructure of the city through establishing integrated education and care centres in each neighbourhood. A multi-disciplinary early intervention initiative supporting children 0 to 7 years in Tilburg provides the focus of the third case study. Data for the case studies were collected via face-to-face interviews with key personnel and reviewing relevant documentation. Key discussion points during the interview were: the origin and rationale for the initiatives; which organisations and co-operating parties are involved; how the initiative works in practice; how all parents are reached; pre-conditions for parental involvement in early learning; assuring quality and evaluating the impact of the initiative and future plans.

2.3.1 Ouderconsulenten, Rotterdam

Background

The municipality of Rotterdam has been supporting neighbourhood based home-school liaison actions for more than 15 years. Initiatives included a *Neighbourhood Mothers* (Buurtmoeders) programme in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and recruitment of Parental Involvement Assistants under a social employment programme. In 2005 the Ouderconsulenten (Parent Counsellor) initiative was established.

What distinguished the Ouderconsulenten initiative from the earlier projects was its requirement that ouderconsulenten had a minimum qualification (MBO3) and ongoing monitoring and coaching support of ouderconsulenten would take place. In 2011-2012 two kinds of parent counselors exist: those who visit families of 2 year-olds at home: known as Neighbourhood Welcome parent counselors (Wijkfeliciteit Ouderconsulenten) and Primary school based parent counselors. In total there are 50 of the former and 150 of the latter, who are spread across neighbourhoods with higher proportion of low ses families and migrant families and where there is perceived most need for intervention. Important to note that the structure and organization of ouderconsulenten initiative will change for school year 2012-2013. The description below relates how it operates in January 2012.

Which organizations are involved?

The Ouderconsulenten initiative is fully financed by the municipality, specifically the department *Jeugd, Onderwijs en Samenleving* or JOS (Children and Youth, Education and Community). Werkgeversinstituut, a non-for profit employment agency is responsible for the administration of contracts, salaries and sick leave for the parent counselors and Stichting de Meeuw is responsible for monitoring and guiding parent counselors and the further development of their role. The two other important partners in the Ouderconsulenten initiative are the school and school management and, in the case of the home visiting ouderconsulenten linked to the neighbourhood welcome service, the relevant welfare organization in the neighbourhood.

What are the aims of the ouderconsulenten initiative?

The central idea behind the initiative is that in order to increase the educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged families (i.e. low SES and/or migrant background), it is necessary to increase parents' capacities to stimulate their children's learning development at home. It is also important that they understand how they need to be involved at pre-school and school to support their child's educational opportunities.

The project leader summarises the approach as follows: 'Weten, willen, kunnen' ('Know, wish to, being able to') i.e. parents first need to know what is expected of them, they need to be motivated to be involved and need to have the capacity to stimulate and be involved in their children's development. The ouderconsulenten address all three aspects. This is a supportive relationship whereby the starting point of ouderconsulenten is the strengths of the parent. The example used to illustrate is that whilst a parent may not read aloud from a book to their child they may frequently tell stories. By recognizing that parents are able to tell a story, parents can be supported to realize that this is one way they can expand their children's vocabulary.

How does the ouderconsulenten initiative work in practice?

Neighbourhood welcome ouderconsulenten

The main aim of neighbourhood welcome service has been to increase participation of children from low SES families in pre-school playgroups and pre-schools following a recognized VVE programme. This is achieved via a visit to the family home when a child turns two years. In addition to bringing a welcome gift from the municipality, the ouderconsulenten informs the parent(s) about the importance of pre-school education for their children's learning and development and future opportunities. As well as being given information about the neighbourhood ECEC services with VVE component, parents are also introduced to other young child and family focused activities and services in the neighborhood. A further aim and opportunity in this home visiting approach is the early identification of problems, needs or risk factors in young children's lives and the possibility of informing parents about other services in the area which can offer more specialized help.

School based ouderconsulenten

Rotterdam is not the only city in the Netherlands where so called home-school liaison personnel or variants of neighbourhood mothers are in place. But what seems to distinguish the Rotterdam initiative from others is firstly, the physical location of the ouderconsulenten in the school or

community centre and secondly, the attention paid to ongoing support and development of the role to meet changing needs of neighbourhoods and families. Discussions with three *ouderconsulenten*, who are located in three different neighbourhoods, revealed both commonalities and differences in their daily work and the relationships they have with parents, children, school staff and other professionals. All three work hard to come in direct contact with parents, by for example being present at the school entrance at arrival and going home time. They specifically look out for new parents and children, helping them find 'their way' within the school system. All three mentioned that no two days were the same – some days they could have no discussions, contacts with parents, other days 15 parents might come with questions. One had her own fixed office space in one school, another was based in the neighbourhood centre, and the third worked across three different schools. In two of the three neighbourhoods, the population was very diverse – countries of origin of families mentioned were Turkey, Cape Verde, Suriname, China, Yugoslavia and the Netherlands in the case of one neighbourhood, and in another: Afghanistan, Morocco, China, Somalia. The third neighbourhood was more homogeneous where 80% of the families were of Moroccan origin.

Group events for parents which the *ouderconsulenten* are actively involved in organizing include coffee mornings, theme evenings – and in the case of one *ouderconsulent*- language support group once a week over 10 weeks. The *ouderconsulenten* also spoke with pride with regard to being invited to liaise with teachers, social workers, and IB's when more insight into a particular family context is necessary. The precise nature of working relations with other professionals within the school depended on the work culture within the school but also how the *ouderconsulent* profiles herself in the team.

The specific benefits to parents of the informal support and group events organized by the *ouderconsulenten* was the opportunity for parents to share common concerns and experiences amongst each other. Sometimes parents suggest a solution, or ways forward to a school related issue raised by another. Also noted was that parents often look for reassurance from the *ouderconsulenten*, especially with first child, about how to deal with school issues, how their children are developing, what they should be able to do at certain age.

When asked about what they felt were the pre-conditions for parental involvement, the *ouderconsulenten* mentioned the importance of parents feeling secure in their environment, feeling valued, respected, and supported. In a very practical way the *ouderconsulenten* pay attention to providing accessible information about the education and school system. Sometimes, this might mean helping parents interpret the school guide including for example the pedagogical methods and approaches described. It was also mentioned that when mothers have own personal development opportunities – by for example participating in a cycling course, or attend a theme evening, they feel better about themselves and this positively affects how they deal with own children. Another direct effect on children mentioned was that children feel a sense of pride when their parents are present and involved in school.

To what extent are fathers involved?

Experiences varied regarding the extent to which fathers were involved. The project leader noted that division of responsibilities between mothers and fathers in most of low SES families which the *ouderconsulenten* have

contact with still very much on traditional lines (mothers responsible for young children, father only involved with older children, and when decisions being made about next stage of education). At the same time it was acknowledged there are differences between groups – especially amongst families where both parents working. Thus the experience in one school was that fathers were equally involved in bringing children to school, attending coffee mornings and helping out with activities. However, the experience of the other two ouderconsulenten was that fathers were less likely than mothers to engage in informal chat or to volunteer, and less likely to respond to written requests for help or to attend events. They felt that the best approach with fathers was a direct one-to-one approach, with requests for help with particular concrete tasks, such as helping on school trips, or cleaning up jobs, especially if older children were involved. It was pointed out that 9 out of 10 fathers will respond positively to such direct requests. Ouderconsulenten used these opportunities to explain how important it is for children that they also get attention from their father.

Since 2005, the project has been running a Fathers' Week, on an annual basis in April, to stimulate father's involvement in a variety of activities in school – such as sport, and art - and to illustrate to them that their role is also important.

Success stories, what is going well?

Individual setting based success stories include the way in which Moroccan mothers have become involved, been trained and have developed in their role as lunchtime supervisors; the weekly Dutch courses which parents are attending, during which childcare is offered for their young children; and the growth in number of parents who make contact with and in the school, ask questions and seek information. All three ouderconsulenten referred to the job satisfaction they experience in their daily work in being part of improving home-school relations, bringing parents closer to school and school to parents and seeing what is possible when there is more open communication. Finally, parents and parental involvement is also prioritized, at least on paper, in the educational policy for the Municipality 'Beter Presteren' (Achieve More), alongside language, mathematics and the professionalization of educators.

Assuring quality and evaluating the impact of the initiative

One means of supporting the quality of the initiative is the mentoring of the individual ouderconsulenten and their professional development in the role using as a guide the comprehensive list of competencies for ouderconsulenten. Whilst it is recognized that the quality of ouderconsulenten has an impact on the quality of the service, this hasn't been measured in this specific project.

The impact of the initiative on child outcomes has never been scientifically measured. A number of qualitative studies, or discussions with teachers have reported a positive impact in terms of increase in activities such as reading aloud to children, sending children to ECEC. In 2009, Oberon, on request from the Municipality conducted an evaluation of the initiative which involved a questionnaire survey of participants and 43 interviews with parents, ouderconsulenten, school directors and welfare organization staff. Key findings of this evaluation with respect to school based ouderconsulenten were: the large diversity between schools regarding the level of interest amongst the parents in activities organized, the degree to which activities are lead or directed by the ouderconsulenten and the

awareness of the school directors of the initiatives. Factors identified in this evaluation which limited the contact between ouderconsulenten and the parents and parental involvement were:

- » Working parents have no time to participate in school activities
- » Parents of older children let them go to school by themselves
- » Lack of interest amongst parents in taking part in activities in parent room
- » Parents not sufficiently competent in Dutch language
- » Suriname, Antillian and Cape Verde parents identified as particularly difficult to reach
- » Assumption on part of native Dutch parents that the ouderconsulent was not intended for them
- » In a few cases groups of parents had preference for a ouderconsulent who had same cultural background as themselves.

Three key factors were identified with regard to the effectiveness of the position: whether or not the ouderconsulent had a 'parent room' available; the extent to which she was part of the school team; skills and competencies – school directors were more critical than ouderconsulenten themselves identifying in particular, presentation skills and talking to a group as an area that needed more attention.

With regard to the home-visiting ouderconsulenten, the study concluded that they were succeeding in making parents aware of the pre-school playgroup services in the area but it was not possible to say whether or not they were having an impact on parents' child-rearing practices or skills. Groups of parents identified as being difficult to reach in home visits were: isolated parents; non-native women who were forbidden by their husbands to speak to outsiders; working parents; parents who said they had no need of information. Being able to assume a professional approach in contact with parents was an area identified as requiring further attention for the neighbourhood ouderconsulenten (Oberon, 2009).

Future?

In 2012, the ouderconsulenten initiative is in transition. Rotterdam's education policy 2011-2014 (ROB) consists of two programmes, Aanval op Uitval (focusing on decreasing school drop-out) and Beter Presenteren (better performance). On 10th January 2012 the municipal government set out revised policies and arrangements for subsidies under these programmes for the school year 2012-2013. The ouderconsulenten initiative is being revised as follows. Firstly, provision will be made for 25 Peuterconsulentten VVE (0.8fte) who will be based in the Centres for Children and Families (in essence replacing home-visiting ouderconsulenten). Parents of all target children will be referred by staff of the Consultatie Bureau (Baby and Child Health clinic) to the Peuterconsulenten at least once and maximum three times. Provision has also been made for 130 Medewerker Ouderbetrokkenheid (parental involvement workers) in primary schools, who will also be involved in the implementation of parent component of Group 0 initiative (Beleidsregel Rotterdam Onderwijs 2012-2013).

2.3.2 SPIL Eindhoven

Background



SPIL, meaning Play, Integration, Learning, is the city of Eindhoven's concept of a Brede School or Broad School. A SPIL centre consists of a primary school, a pre-school playgroup, daycare service and child-rearing support, all under the same roof. In 2000 the municipality took the decision that all neighbourhoods in Eindhoven would have their own SPIL centre. By 2012, there were 45 SPIL centres, of which 20 are fully integrated under the same roof. The aim is to have 57 by 2015 i.e. one for each neighbourhood.

The overall aim of SPIL is to strengthen the pedagogical infrastructure across the city and its neighbourhoods by providing a continuous and integrated learning and development track for children 0 to 12 years and providing child-rearing support to parents which is adapted to their particular needs. SPIL centres are physically close to where families with young children live. In this respect they can be understood as the Eindhoven version of a Centre for Children and Families¹⁰ i.e. easy accessible, low threshold, one-stop shop for neighbourhood support for parents and children. Seven of the 45 SPIL centres also include a Consultatie Bureau (Baby and Child Health Clinic for 0-4 year-olds) on site. Importantly, all municipal funds earmarked for policies relating to children, whether for child-rearing support, 0-4 year olds, VVE, Centres for Children and Families, buildings, go into the central SPIL 'pot'.

In order to get a better insight into what SPIL means in practice for children, parents and professionals, and in particular the place of parents in children's learning and development within the SPIL 'construction', an informal interview was held with the SPIL Process Manager, and a pedagogical advisor, who works as an outreach support worker with primarily non-native families in three SPIL centres. The interview took place in one of the 45 SPIL centres, where it was also possible to meet with the staff of the preschool playgroup and the primary school director. This report is based on these discussions in addition to the information gleaned from a range of supporting written documentation.

How does SPIL work in practice

All SPIL centres are obliged to follow a common operational framework and pedagogical plan and abide by agreed policies and protocols. Organisations involved include: welfare organisations (Lumens, K2), primary schools, daycare organisations¹¹ (one very large, Korein and 10 smaller with 1-3 locations in Eindhoven), the local health authority (GGD) and staff of Centre for Young Families (including Baby Health Clinic). The training and professional development organization, Fontys Hogeschool Eindhoven and CoACT Consultancy have also supported the development of guidelines. The elaboration of the pedagogical plan is intended as a collaborative exercise involving all participating partners in the SPIL centre, with support, where needed, of the Process Manager. It focuses on the direct work with children, work with parents in terms of child-rearing support, and the collaborative working between the professionals with respect to parental involvement, safety and health, child mistreatment and bullying. The intention is that by 2015, all 57 SPIL centres will have developed and be implementing a pedagogical plan. Given the requirements of Wet OKE with respect to tackling educational disadvantage and the provision of good quality VVE experiences¹² for young children, increasing attention is being paid to the educational aspect of the pedagogical plan for the SPIL centres.

¹⁰ There is one centralized administrative office for Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin in the offices of the Municipality. On two days per week, representatives from all the professional groups are present and can be telephoned for general advice. A second role, relates to the so called 'difficult cases'.

¹¹ In total there are 40 childcare organisations operating in Eindhoven, but only 11 are linked to a SPIL centre.

The target from the Municipality is that all target group children (0-4 years) (100%) should be attending a centre-based VVE Programme within one of the 57 SPIL centres. Currently just 50% of target group children attend pre-school playgroups, and another approximately 30% attend daycare within a SPIL centre. The rest (approx. 10%) attend child-minding services or are cared for by grandparents or other family members. Home based programmes, such as Op Stap and Spel aan Huis are offered to families who do not attend a centre-based service. Finally, there is a very small group who attend of special care services for children with special needs.

Engaging parents in learning and development of their children

Engaging and involving parents has been a central aim of SPIL from the outset. Parental involvement is conceptualized in three levels: *communication* – parents can give and receive information; *participation* – parents are involved in thinking together, doing together, learning together within the SPIL centre; *influencing* – parents have the possibility to influence developments within SPIL. Relevant questions for reflection for SPIL partners are: How do you communicate with parents? How do you ensure that parents can be involved? And how can parents influence or have a say in policy?¹³

According to the pre-school playgroup team leader it had been easier to involve mothers in the pre-school playgroup when the population was more homogeneous and was more or less split 50-50 between Dutch and Turkish communities. Organised coffee mornings were viewed by mothers as an opportunity to meet up with and share experiences amongst their own (cultural) community. Currently, the range of countries of origin of the families in the school is very diverse and turn-out to organized activities is low. The Pedagogical Advisor noted that you can respond in two ways to a poor show of parents to an activity: “We won’t do this again, because parents don’t come” or “How can we organize this differently so that parents are interested to attend or can attend”?

In addition to offering an accessible neighbourhood service for both children and parents, the design of SPIL is such that situations of risk for children’s healthy learning and development are identified and acted upon in a co-ordinated fashion, focusing on the family context, rather than on the individual child. The approach pre-supposes that all practitioners working directly with children (whether in baby health clinic, preschool playgroup, daycare etc) have the skills and capacity to identify developmental concerns (cognitive, social-emotional, physical) and can recognize risky home contexts which threaten children’s well-being.

¹² Each SPIL centre is free to choose which VVE programme to follow. .

¹³ In collaboration with the Fontys Hogeschool Eindhoven (Sociaal Pedagogische Hulpverlening course), a very comprehensive handbook on parental involvement for SPIL practitioners was developed in 2005. It is full of practical ideas and suggestions for engaging with parents as well as providing a summary of the underlying theoretical frameworks informing the approach. It is organized under the following themes: vision and aims; analyzing the needs of the target group; informing (sharing information); participation (in the SPIL centre); influencing.

Within each SPIL centre, the key coordinating staff from each of the partners make up the Care Team – i.e. the school’s IB, the staff member responsible for Opvoedingsondersteuning and Ontwikkelingsstimulerend (O&O); the manager or practitioner of daycare, school social worker and the neighbourhood nurse (0-4 year-olds) and Youth doctor or nurse (4 to 12 year-olds) linked to the Centre for Youth and Families. They meet regularly in order to advise on and co-ordinate the Centre’s response to children and families in need of extra attention. For example, if it is determined that a family needs extra specialized help, such as a family coach, or outreach workers this can also be organized in consultation with Centre for Children and Families. Special financial provision has also been made for families experiencing stress for their children to avail of services of daycare, which is considered as a family support measure. Addressing concerns from family context perspective rather than from individual

child perspective is also important in preventative work in relation to child maltreatment.¹⁴

Reaching all families

Both the SPIL process manager and Pedagogical advisor emphasised the importance of good and respectful communication in reaching and engaging with parents, when we discussed the pre-conditions for parental involvement particularly in relation to 'hard to reach' families.. They note that the starting position has to be that parents have questions rather than problems. The context within which families live needs to be taken into account when offering help and advice. Also noted was the variation among SPIL centres in what is viewed as acceptable in making contact with parents: for example, informal chats on the school playground at arrival and home time, or email contact with O&O, or a regular weekly consulting hour. It was emphasized that communication between families and professionals needed to be a two way process, where both parents and school have responsibility and are genuinely willing and able to work together. Professionals need to have skills and competences in working with and communicating with parents. On their side, it is important that parents do not relinquish all responsibility to the 'expert' professionals, and realize that they also have a role, and that the best approach is to work together.

The pedagogical advisor's¹⁵ prior experience as a primary school teacher, led her to the conclusion that there were a group of parents (primarily from Moroccan origin) who were not being reached by the child-rearing support services or school social work, primarily due their reluctance to seek help or to ask questions because of their perceived shame with having to seek help. With support from an alderman in the municipality, she has for the past two years ran a pilot project whereby, she focused on engaging personally with all the Moroccan parents in the neighbourhood to persuade them to send their children to the pre-school playgroup. She also offered child-rearing support by providing Triple P training for mother groups.

From January 2012, her role and position has been formalised within the Centre for Children and Youth – where she is a Pedagogical Advisor working primarily amongst 3 SPIL centres/schools. Her task is to stay close to the people (particularly non-native Dutch) in the neighbourhood and in the SPIL centres, tune into families and children's needs, and identify opportunities to make positive changes and step in and offer extra support where needed. For example, one of her observations had been that the mothers' involvement in training was the stimulus for fathers to take initiatives for their own personal development and capacity building as child-rearers. The Municipality, has since facilitated the establishment of fathers' groups, whereby fathers can also follow the Triple P training.¹⁶

The Pedagogical Advisor is also convinced of the importance in investing time in face to face contact to explain to parents how the Dutch system of pre-school education and primary school education works, and what the expectations of parents are.

Assuring quality and evaluating the impact of SPIL

Key to ensuring that SPIL continues in Eindhoven is being able to demonstrate that SPIL is having a positive effect. Two main indicators or outputs have been identified to measure the impact of SPIL: children's learning outcomes and children's well-being (including all aspects of psychological and physical health). The plan is to use existing data to

¹⁴ Municipality of Eindhoven are currently exploring the family context based Signs of Safety approach to dealing with child-maltreatment and 14 professionals have just been trained. This will be integrated into the 5 level response to children and families in risky situations, within which SPIL partners are involved as co-operating partners.

¹⁵ Her initiative was awarded a Civil Society Prize, in recognition for her achievements in involving everyone in the neighbourhood in child-rearing.

¹⁶ A few HBO trained non-native fathers initially followed the Triple P and they now being supported in delivering Triple P programme to other fathers within some of the SPIL centres.

measure input and effects (outputs) such as: “frequency of physical exercise per week” (input) “individual child measures on the BME index” (output), or measures and scores on the VVE assessments. It is acknowledged that it is difficult to separate out the impact of the SPIL as an independent influencing factor. Results of the impact study are not yet publically available.

Finally, in terms for the future sustainability of SPIL, the SPIL Process Manager takes heart in the fact that SPIL has cross-party support at the Municipal level. Although originally a proposal of a PvdA alderman, it continued to receive support from the responsible alderman from CDA and most recently from GroenLinks political party.

2.3.3 Vroeghulp Locket, Kind en Jeugd, Tilburg

Background

Vroeghulp Locket (VHL) (early help service) offers a preventative approach focusing on children between ages 0 and 7 years. In essence it involves early identification, diagnosis and intervention in a situation where parents or professionals are concerned about a child’s development and/or behaviour. The approach is based on the principle that problems at a later age can be reduced, and sometimes prevented through an early and integrated approach involving a co-ordinated multi-disciplinary team of professionals, with the active support and involvement of parents. This is a free service, which is open to all families with young children. It is estimated that there are 40,000 children across the Netherlands who could benefit from the approach (Chiel Bos, 2011).

This short case study describes the experiences in just one region where VHL exists – Midden Brabant. Discussions were held with one of the co-ordinators, with further input with her colleagues, in the VHL centre in the GGD offices in Tilburg, which is the co-ordinating centre for VHL in the Midden Brabant. Here the VHL shares space with the Centra voor Jeugd en Gezin (Centre for Children and Families).

The Midden Brabant region has been working with an integrated multi-disciplinary approach for young children with developmental concerns since 2002. Between 2006-2011 it was one of 11 regions selected to pilot the innovative Vroeg, Voortdurend, Integraal (VVI) approach. This initiative, led and financed by the Ministry of Health, Care (VWS) (Long-term care, social support and youth care) with co-operation of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) (Youth, Education and Care) gave an extra impulse to integrated support of families of young children. It is now implemented nationwide and 37 integrated early help teams (Vroeghulp Locket) are in place.

Which organizations are involved?

The VHL team, who are located in the GGD building in Tilburg, consists of a manager, three co-ordinators and an administrator. In 2011, the service supported 187 new children and their families – this represented a 50% increase compared to 2010, and beginning 2012 two additional co-ordinators have been recruited to deal with the extra demand on the service. The VHL team is supported in their work, by a multi-disciplinary core team, who come together two times per month to discuss diagnosis and suitable interventions and advice/ care plans regarding individual children. This team consists of the following experts: a pediatrician; a

psychologist; physiotherapist; speech therapist; a pedagogue specializing in special educational needs; a rehabilitation doctor, a behavior expert from Bureau Jeugdzorg; a school social worker, and an advisor from MEE (state supported organization for people with disabilities or chronic illness, their parents and carers).

Key characteristics of the approach

The VHL service is characterized by a number of key principles:

Early intervention: the earliest age of child with which VHL deal with is about 2.5 years. However, the team would very much like to reach children at an earlier age in the belief that the earlier the diagnosis takes place, the more effective the intervention, and better for the child. Furthermore, behaviour patterns are less established and easier to change at an earlier age.

Child in context: attention is paid to analysing the whole childrearing and relational context around the child, including both vertical and horizontal relationships, and parents' strengths and limitations.

Speed of response during the whole trajectory - waiting times for appointment for intake interview, for follow up, interventions, reporting are all kept to a minimum.

Continuity of support: the co-ordinator, who first meets with the parents and child at the intake interview, is the key contact person for the parent and family throughout the whole process.

Co-ordinated support: in Midden Brabant region, 18 different organizations successfully collaborate to devise a co-ordinated plan for a child and family.

How does the Vroeghulp Locket initiative work in practice?

First contacts

The catalyst for the intervention of VHL is concern, typically by a parent or a staff member from the Baby and Child Health Clinic (Consultatie Bureau), that something is 'wrong' with their child. Once a parent makes initial telephone contact with the Locket, an appointment for an intake discussion is made. This normally takes place within 5 working days.

Intake discussion with parents and child

During intake discussion, to which both father and mother and child are invited, information is gathered on a broad ranges of issues covering the parents' own childhood history (own parenting, whether they were victims of abuse), pregnancy and birth experience with concerned child, child's development on a range of domains, general behavior, play behaviours, current family situation (relationship quality, possible tension, abuse, violence)¹⁷, whether parents themselves are receiving professional (psychiatric) support, parents' strengths and limitations in child-rearing. An important part of the intake is to explore with parents what they view as the problem or concern about their child and their expectations of VHL. At the end of the intake next steps are explained and agreed and parents are asked their permission for VHL to approach other services for information on child. The intake discussion takes on average between 1.5 and 2 hours.

Information gathering

Following the intake, the co-ordinator approaches other services and

¹⁷ One of the tools used to support the exploration of family relations is play mobile figures representing children, parents, grandparents etc and their positioning in relation to each other, sensitivities and difficulties in relationships. In this respect, the intake interview has a therapeutic character.

professionals which have contact with the child, such as daycare centre, health clinic, school, for a report on the child from their perspective, based on standard questions.

Multi-disciplinary core team meeting

Once all information gathered, the multi-disciplinary core team meets and discusses the individual case guided particularly by questions and concerns of parents (which in 95% of cases, centre on the question if there is something 'wrong' with their child, and if so, how do they deal with the situation). Typically, 15 children are discussed in the 1.5-hour core team meetings, which are chaired by one of the co-ordinators. These discussions are managed in a very efficient way, in terms of attendance, time-keeping. A decision was made in the Midden-Brabant region not to include parents in this discussion because of the extra time this would involve. A strength of the multi-disciplinary core-team is that many of the members have been involved for up to 10 years, they know each other well, value the opportunity to exchange views and experiences and are thus motivated to attend.

Reporting back to parents

The next step is that the co-ordinator reports back the outcome of the core-team discussion to the parents in a face-to-face meeting. The advice, whether a diagnosis, further investigation, testing, home based support or intervention is carefully explained. Importantly, parents are free to decide whether or not to follow up the advice except in the case where the child's development is viewed as being in danger.¹⁸

Supporting transition to intervention

The co-ordinator is also involved in supporting parents to take the next steps in the child's care and education. If for example it is recommended that the child attend a daycare for children with additional needs, the co-ordinator will accompany the parents in their orientation visit to the centre. Attention is paid to creating the conditions for a 'warm' transition involving direct person-to-person contact with the professionals, parents and children involved, rather than merely passing on a paper or computer file.

Bringing the VHL support to a formal close

Approximately 6 weeks to 2 months following the hand-over of the child to a new service, or the beginning of a new intervention, the responsible co-ordinator will phone the parents to ask how things are going. If they are satisfied then the dossier is closed within the VHL, although parents are free to phone VHL at any time with further questions. At this point a formal end report is sent to parents, and a copy to the child's general practitioners (Huisarts) and if applicable the IB'er in the primary school. Parents decide whether or not they wish to make report available to staff in daycare centre or pre-school playgroup. The whole trajectory lasts, on average, about 9 months.

Pre-conditions for parental involvement in early learning and development

We discussed what could be core pre-conditions for parental involvement in early learning in the home context. In the co-ordinator's view, the most critical factor is healthy vertical relationships within a family i.e. parents relationships with their own parents, and with their child. In order to engage parents in supporting their children's development or engage them in a process of support such as offered by VHL, it is essential that parents feel welcome. This begins with the first contacts by phone. Other important factors mentioned were the importance of reacting quickly; a warm welcome for parents and children to the intake meeting; treating parents respectfully;

¹⁸ In these cases, the co-ordinator explains the implications of the Meldcode Kindermishandeling, and their responsibility to ensure that adequate measures are taken to support the safe development of child.

attention to supporting parents when giving ‘bad’ news for example a diagnosis of autism.

Reaching all families

Families from all backgrounds and education levels have availed of the service. However, so far, non-native Dutch speaking families are less likely to avail of the service (as proportion of the population in Midden-Brabant) compared to native Dutch families. The reasons for this are varied and include: lack of awareness about available services and possibilities, a feeling of shame in having to seek help as a parent and language barriers.

In cases where parents do not speak Dutch, a neutral interpreter is involved.¹⁹ Another option is to ask a member of the own community to support interpretation. Whilst this service is free, not all parents like to involve other members of the community, because of private, sensitive nature of what is discussed. In the co-ordinator's view, the neutral unknown interpreter is often a better option.

Particular attention is also paid to including both fathers and mothers in the process. In cases where parents are separated, divorced and where relationship is very difficult, a separate discussion takes place with each parent separately. In 99% in cases fathers are involved.

VHL is also dependent on others to direct parents to their service. In order to raise awareness about the VHL, co-ordinators also regularly give presentations about the service to different audiences such as: Centre for Non-Dutch women, groups of speech therapists or physiotherapists, pediatricians, GPs, primary school interne-begeleiders (school care team co-ordinators). They are also regularly invited to give guest lectures in the Fontys Hogeschool (Higher Education college for professional education and training) or at the ROCs (vocational college training for classroom assistants).

Assuring quality and evaluating the impact of the initiative

Quality is assured through the well-developed methodology (described above) and the quality of the personnel involved. Co-ordinators are all trained at a HBO+ level. Necessary skills and qualities for the role highlighted are: knowledge of child development and therapeutic interview skills with adults and children, involvement, empathy, listening, ability to follow through. Attention is also paid to co-ordinators' continuing professional development.

Monitoring and evaluation occurs at a number of levels. The VHL manager monitors the performance and functioning of the individual co-ordinators. Parental satisfaction with the service is monitored via evaluation forms sent to all parents – parents are typically very satisfied with the service received in Midden Brabant region. Annual subsidy to the service is linked to its satisfactory reach, implementation and parental satisfaction, which needs to be documented and submitted to the management group of VHL initiative on an annual basis.

An overall cost-benefit analysis of the approach (business case) has also been conducted, which has indicated the later savings if problems are tackled earlier.

However, the team in VHL in Midden-Brabant are very keen to do further more in-depth research to assess the impact of their work on children and are currently exploring options in this regard.

¹⁹ Up to end of 2011 the costs for this service have been covered. However, beginning in 2012 families must pay for interpreter.

Future?

The current subsidy from national government for the service is guaranteed until 2015. There is some uncertainty about how the service will be affected by the decentralization of financing and management to the municipalities and the services likely location with the Centre for Children and Families structure. There are nine different municipalities in Midden-Brabant, each with their own Centre for Children and Family. The team is aware that they need to make a strong case for the value of the early identification, diagnosis and intervention, in each of the nine municipalities in the Region, especially given the current climate of budget cuts at municipal level. However, VHL in Midden-Brabant is optimistic for the future and sees the current structural changes in services for children as an opportunity rather than a threat.

2.3.4 Learning from case studies of good practice

A commonality across the case studies is attention to providing a **continuum or joined-up services for young children and their families**. In some instances this entails enhancing the connections and sharing between home and ECEC settings (SPOREN, Amsterdam; VBJK, Flanders), making sure services are physically close to where families live (SPIL) and taking the whole child-rearing and relational context in account when supporting children's early learning and development (Early Help Service, Tilburg). In other cases, we see explicit attention to formal and non-formal centre based ECEC services working collaboratively with home based services, social and health services and sometimes adult education (SPIL, Eindhoven; Ouderconsulenten, Rotterdam).

Political commitment and a longterm vision has been a key success factor for sustainability of policies and practice. This is particularly evident in the cross-political party support in the municipality of Eindhoven for SPIL, ensuring coherence and continuity even with government changes. Governments depend on sound information and research data from 'the field' to inform policies. Some of the organisations featured in the case studies have also succeeded in forging strong links with government agencies and research institutions as well as with parents, practitioners and community organisations ensuring a meaningful flow of learning between practice, research and policy, leading to better chances of success.

Another important theme addressed in the case-studies of good practice was **engaging fathers as well as mothers in supporting their children's learning** and development. Examples described include: the development of guidelines and a monitoring instrument to support ECEC services to critically reflect on the level of father's involvement in ECEC (VBJK, Flanders); the facilitation of fathers groups (Parenting course delivered by fathers for fathers in Eindhoven; Dad's Group and Father Infant massage, Pen Green, UK); and the organisation of a fathers' week in schools (Rotterdam). In the Early Help Service in Tilburg it is viewed as essential to include both fathers and mothers in the early intervention process.

Supporting **parents, practitioners and children as active learners** is a key principle of underpinning practice in the SPOREN ECEC approach in the Netherlands, Pen Green, UK and the projects of Bureau Mutant. This ensures a greater balance of power and respectful relations between parents and practitioners, where the roles of professional knowledge and parents' experience are seen as complementary and equally important. In SPOREN, parents, children, and practitioners are all stimulated to develop

an explorative attitude. In Pen Green this is characterised as action for the parent (helping parents to reclaim their own education and build up their self-esteem) and action for children (encouraging parents to child-watch, to be involved in and respectful of their children's learning process and development). In both these cases good pedagogical documentation supported learning.

All organisations and initiatives described the need for **professionals to be skilled in responding to a diversity of families and parents** (different countries of origin and cultural background, social class, educational level, fathers and mothers) and to families' changing needs and circumstances. The importance of good communication skills with fathers and mothers, parents feeling listened to, respected and supported was a recurrent theme. So too was the need for practitioners to actively seek alternative means of reaching parents if the usual approaches were not working. The cross national Parent-Professional Partnerships (IPP) research study has also stressed that early childhood professionals need to develop a variety of flexible and family sensitive models of cooperation given that parents differ individually in their capacity to develop and maintain partnerships with teachers (Hujula et al. 2009).

Finally, the structural changes with respect to local governance and financing of social and educational services for young children which gives municipalities more responsibilities, coupled with municipal budgetary cuts means that at the beginning of 2012 there is **uncertainty regarding the future sustainability of many of the initiatives and programmes described in this report**. Thus, while on the one hand national government is advocating improved partnership between parents and educators, the available resources to support this work are under threat.

REFERENCES

- Asscher, J.** (2005) 'Parenting Support in Community Settings: Parental Needs and Effectiveness of the Home-Start Program, PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Baekelmans, R.** (1994) Parental participation: some social, democratic and psychological thoughts in VBJK (eds) Report of European Network for School-age Childcare 5th International Congress, Ghent 1994. VBJK & Kind en Gezin.
- Bakker, M.** (2011) 'Je kunt best vaker iets doen op school', Interview Marja van Bijsterveldt, Minister van Onderwijs, De Volkskrant, 30 November 2011.
- Berg, le Clercq, T.** (2011) The role of local authorities in parenting support, Report of the Eurochild Family and Parenting Thematic Working Group Round Table, Eindhoven, May 2011, Brussels: Eurochild.
- Boink** (2011) Opvoeden op het kinderdagverblijf voor oudercommissies, Utrecht, Boink.
- Borgdorff, M.** (2011) Ouderbetrokkenheid volgens juf Marja. <http://www.ouders.nl/mond2011-bijsterveldt1.htm>
- Bucx, F.** (2011) Gezinsrapport 2011. Een portret van het gezinsleven in Nederland. Den Haag, Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
- Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., Vorhaus, J.** (2011) Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development. London: NRDC, Institute of Education.
- CBS and SCP** (2011) Armoedesignalement 2011, Dec 2011. Den Haag, CBS/SCP.
- Chiel Bos Advies** (2011) Zo vroeg mogelijk: Advies en aanbevelingen bij de verankering van Integrale Vroeghulp met de innovatie Vroeg, Voortdurend Integraal (VVI). Bussum, Chiel Bos.
- Connor, J. and Wheeler, H.** (2009) Parents, Early Years and Learning, EYE, 10, 9, 36-42.
- Council of Europe** (2006) Recommendation Rec (2006) 19 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on policy to support positive parenting. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1073507&Site=CM>
- van Dartel, N., Schellings, J.** (2007) De formele positie van ouders in het onderwijs. Werkgroep ouderbetrokkenheid, ingesteld naar aanleiding van de intentieverklaring 'Versterking School-Ouderbetrokkenheid'.
- Dearden, L., Sibieta, L. & Sylva, K.** (2010) From birth to age 5: Evidence from the Millenium Cohort Study, in: A. Goodman & P. Gregg (eds) Poorer children's educational attainment: How important are attitudes and behavior? (London: Rowntree Foundation), 18-25.
- De Laat, L., van Egten, C. and Duesmann-Oosterlaan, B.** (2011) Diversiteit in de Oudercommissies van de Kinderopvang, Handleiding voor Trainers, Boink, Grontmij and E-Quality.
- Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A.** (2003) The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review, Department for Education and Skills, Queens Printer.
- Dijk van M., van der Loo, S, Meurs, M, Pijnenburg, E, van Zelst, J.** (2005) Protocol Ouderbetrokkenheid. Eindhoven, Gemeente Eindhoven.

EACEA (2009) Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities through ECEC in Europe, Brussels, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency Eurydice.

Eurofound - European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2010) Developing support to parents through early childhood services, workshop report, Brussels, 27th November 2009, Dublin, Eurofound.

European Commission (2011) Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow, Communication from the Commission, COM (2011) 66 final, Brussels, 17.2.2011.

European Economic and Social Committee (2010) Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Early Childhood Care and Education, Soc/358, Brussels, 20 January 2010.

Gemeente Rotterdam (2012) Beleidsregel Onderwijs Rotterdam 2012-2013, vastgesteld door het college van burgemeester en wethouders van Rotterdam op 10 januari 2012

Gerrits, R. (2011) 'Ouders en scholen moeten praten', Interview Micha de Winter, Hoogleraar Opvoedingsvraagstukken, De Volkskrant, 10 December 2011.

Goodall, J. and Vorhaus, J. (2011) Review of best practice in parental engagement. Research Report DFE-RR156, Department for Education.

Goodman, A. and Gregg, P. (2010) Poorer children's educational attainment: How Important are attitudes and behavior?, London, Rowntree Foundation.

de Graaff, F. and van Keulen, A. (2008) Making the road as we go: Parents and professionals as partners managing diversity in early childhood education, Practice and Reflections Series, No. 23: The Hague, Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Hanrahan-Cahuzak, M. (2002) Mum to Mum: An evaluation of a community based health promotion programme for first time mothers in the Netherlands. PhD thesis, Wageningen University.

Hartas, D. (2010) Families' social backgrounds matter: socio-economic factors, home learning and young children's language, literacy and social outcomes, British Educational Research Journal.

Hartas, D. (2011) Inequality and the home learning environment: predictions about seven-year-olds' language and literacy, in British Educational Research Journal iFirst Article, 1-21.

Hoek, van der J. and Pels, T. (2008) Partnerships with immigrant parents – no standard formulas, Chapter 2 in F. de Graaff and A. van Keulen, Making the Road as We Go, Parents and Professionals as Partners Managing Diversity in Early Childhood Education, Den Haag, Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Hogeboom, B. (2009) Oogst: School en ouders, partnerschap voor leerling success. Presentation by CPS Onderwijs, Ontwikkeling en Advies, 31 March 2009, De Reehorst te Ede.

Huisman, C. (2011) 'Kamp zou dit moeten toejuichen', Reportage Gevaar dreigt voor crèches waar ouders zelf voor de kinderen zorgen, De Volkskrant, 19 November 2011.

Hujala, E., Turja, L., Gaspar, M. F., Veisson, M. and Waniganayake, M. (2009) Perspectives of early childhood teachers on parent-teacher partnerships in five European countries, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 17, 1, 57-76.

Kalthoff, H. (2011) Ouderbetrokkenheid bij voor- en vroegschoolse educatie, peuterspeelzaal en onderwijs. ECO3 Factsheet, Kohnstamm Instituut, Sardes and Nederlands Jeugd Instituut.

Kans, K., Lubberman, J., van der Vegt, A. (2009) Monitor ouderbetrokkenheid in het funderend onderwijs. Eerste meting onder scholen en ouders, Rotterdam, ECORYS and Sardes.

Leseman, P. (2009) The impact of high quality education and care on the development of young children: Review of the literature in EACEA (ed) Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities through ECEC in Europe, Brussels, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency Eurydice.

Loket Vroeghulp Kind en Jeugd (2010) Inspiratieboek Samenwerken vanuit de Basis: Bouwstenen voor Innovatie en het Verder Ontwikkelen van Integrale Vroeghulp. Loket Vroeghulp Kind en Jeugd, MEE regio Tilburg, MEE Brabant Noord, Vroeg Voordurend Integraal.

MacNaughton, G. and Hughes, P. (2008) Parents, partnerships and power, Chapter 6 in F. de Graaff and A. van Keulen, Making the Road as We Go, Parents and Professionals as Partners Managing Diversity in Early Childhood Education, Den Haag, Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Menheere, A. and Hooge, E. (2010) De betrokkenheid van ouders bij het schoolleren van hun kinderen. Een literatuurstudie naar de betekenis van ouderbetrokkenheid voor de schoolse ontwikkeling van kinderen, Amsterdam, Kenniscentrum Onderwijs en Opvoeding, Hogeschool van Amsterdam.

Mesman, J. (2010) Oud geleerd, jong gedaan. Investeren in ouders bevordert onderwijskansen van kinderen, Oratie, University of Leiden, 24 September.

Mesman, J., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (forthcoming) Unequal in Opportunity, Equal in Process: Parental Sensitivity Promotes Positive Child Development in Ethnic Minority Families, in Child Development Perspectives.

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (2011) Brief aan de Tweede Kamer over het thema 'Betrokkenheid van ouders bij de school', 29th November 2011. Den Haag.

Oberon (2009) Evaluatieonderzoek van de functie ouderconsulenten. De betrokkenheid van ouders bij Rotterdamse basisscholen en welzijninstellingen, Utrecht, Oberon.

OECD (2012) Research brief: Parental and Community Engagement Matters, Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Starting Strong III Toolbox.

Onderwijsraad (2010) Advies Ouders als partners, Versterking van relaties met en tussen ouders op school, uitgebracht aan de Voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, Den Haag, Onderwijsraad.

Post, J. and Zijlker, I, Embregts, P, and de Moor, P. (2006) Evaluatieonderzoek: Integrale Vroeghulp Platform Zuid. Tussenrapport, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen.

Prott, R. & Hautumm, A. (2004) 12 principles for a successful cooperation between childcare workers and parents, Amsterdam: SWP publishing.

Roest, A. (2011) Kunnen meer kinderen meedoen? Verandering in de maatschappelijke deelname van kinderen, 2008-2010. Den Haag, SCP.

Roetman, D. & Schepers, W. (2012) Opstap naar de Samenleving, Childcare International, Amsterdam: SWP publishers.

Rijksoverheid (2011) Wegwerken taalachterstanden, nieuwsbrief nummer 61 , 25 November 2011 <http://abonneren.rijksoverheid.nl/article/primair-onderwijs/nieuwsbrief-primair-onderwijs-nummer-61/wegwerken-taalachterstanden/1036/10157>

Share, M., Kerrins, L., Greene, S. (2011) Developing Early Years Professionalism: Evaluation of the Early Learning Initiative's Professional Development Programme in Community Childcare Centres in the Dublin Docklands. Dublin: National College of Ireland.

Sheridan, S.M., Knoche, L.L., Edwards, C., Bovaird, J.A. and Kupzyk, K.A. (2010) Parent Engagement and School Readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready Intervention on Preschool Children's Social-Emotional Competencies, *Early Education and Development*, 21,1, 125-156.

Singer, E. (2011) *Opvoeden op het kinderdagverblijf: wat ouders moeten weten*, Amsterdam, Elsevier.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Mayo, A., Melhuish, E., Taggart, B., Sammons, P. and Sylva, K. (2011) Performing against the odds: developmental trajectories of children in the EPPSE 3-16 study, Research Brief, DFE-RB128.

Smit, F., Driessen, G. and Doesborgh, J. (2005) *Opvattingen van allochtone ouders over onderwijs: tussen wens en realiteit*, Nijmegen, ITS.

Smit, F., Driessen, G., van Kuijk, J., de Wit, C. (2008) *VVE en ouders: Ouderbetrokkenheid en –participatie in de Voor- en Vroegschoolse Educatie*, Nijmegen, ITS, Radboud Universiteit.

Smit, F., Driessen, G. and de Wit, C. (2009) *Stappenplan optimalisering ouderbetrokkenheid in de Voor- en Vroegschoolse Educatie*, Nijmegen, ITS, Radboud Universiteit.

Stoffelen, A. (2011) 'Door contract zijn ouders betrokken', Interview Anneke Spoelder, Directeur Basisschool, *De Volkskrant*, 3 December 2011.

Urban, M. (2009) Early Childhood Education in Europe: Achievements, challenges and possibilities, *Education International*.

Vandenbroeck, M. (2009) Let us disagree, Editorial Special Issue on children's and parents' perspectives on diversity in early childhood education, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17,2, 165-170.

Vandenbroeck, M. and Urban, M. (2012) *CoRe, Competence requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care, Final Report*, University of East London, Cass School of Education and University of Ghent, Department for Social Welfare Studies London.

VBJK, PBD Stad Gent, Flora vzw (2006) *Ouderparticipatie: ook voor vaders! Hoe kan je vaders betrekken bij kinderopvang*.

VBJK (2008) *Kinderopvang met sociale functie: een plaats waar kinderen, ouders, medewerkers en buurt elkaar ontmoeten*. Gent: VBJK.

Wg Infoblad (2011) *Ouderconsulenten*, wg infoblad, No. 5, mei 2011.

Whitmarsh, J. (2009) Othered voices: asylum-seeking mothers and early years education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 19 (4), 535 – 551.

Wit de C. (2005) *Ouders als educatieve partner: Een handreiking voor scholen*. Den Haag: Qprimair.

Yaman, A., Mesman, J., van IJzendoorn, M.H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J., Linting, M. (2010) Parenting in an Individualistic Culture with a Collectivistic Cultural Background: The Case of Turkish Immigrant Families with Toddlers in the Netherlands, in *Journal Child and Family Studies* 19:617–628.

Websites, important links

<http://www.boink.info/oudercommissie>

<http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/publicaties/571/documenten/ouders-als-partners.pdf>

<http://ernape.net> (*European Network about Parents in Education*)

<http://vng.nl>

<http://voorzorg.info>

<http://home-start.nl>

<http://nji.nl>

<http://www.ouders.nl>

<http://www.vbjk.be>

<http://www.mutant.nl>

<http://www.pengreen.org>

<http://www.kopopouders.nl>

<http://pedagogieontwikkeling.nl>

<http://www.stichtingdemeeuw.nl/web/>

<http://www.tienermoeders.nl>

<http://www.jongvader.nl>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals were consulted in the course of this study and the author would like to gratefully acknowledge their contribution. Very much appreciated is the willing participation in the case study interviews of the following: Anne-Riet van Haaren and colleagues at Loket Vroeghulp, Tilburg; Hanny Versluis, Najat Toub, Gemeente Eindhoven; Suzana Zornic and colleagues at Stichting de Meeuw, Rotterdam.

Also appreciated is the support of Anke van Keulen (Bureau Mutant), Margot Meewig (P0-7), Jan Peeters (VBJK), and Elly Singer (University of Utrecht) in checking the summaries of the Bernard van Leer Foundation projects in which they were involved. The study also benefited from fruitful discussions and/or material received from Kees Broekhof and Hans Cohen de Lara (Sardes), Tijne Berg-le Clercq (Nji) , Judi Mesman (University of Leiden) and Frederik Smit (Radboud University). Finally thanks are due to ICDI colleagues, Esther Miedema, Nico van Oudenhoven and Mathijs Euwema for editing assistance.

APPENDIX 1: Pre-requisites and success factors for partnership

Within the practice and policy literature on ECEC it is possible to find so called 'success factors' or prerequisites for optimal partnership between parents and ECEC services, which have been drawn up based on research and experience in different contexts. Five examples are mentioned here: two from the Netherlands, and three international.

Wissema et al. 1996 identified the following as necessary for optimal partnership between parents and VVE services, namely: partnership culture, partnership structure, willingness to partnership and skills in partnership.

Smit, Driessen, de Wit (2009) Stappenplan optimaliseren ouderbetrokkenheid in de Voor- en Vroegschoolse Educatie.

One of the outcomes of the **2002 Central and Eastern European Child Childhood Care and Development Regional Meeting** was the development of principles that would support practitioners in establishing partnerships with parents, which were subsequently published as '12 principles for a successful cooperation between childcare workers and parents' (Prott and Hautumm, 2004), financially supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. These are organised under three broad headings:

Pre-conditions for co-operation

1. Find out about your understanding of co-operation and partnership and what you are really striving for.
2. Check whether the interests of the stakeholders immediately concerned – the childcare centre, the parents and the institution – really meet.
3. Clarify the precise assignment of your institution in order to develop a realistic concept of co-operation
4. Mind the barrier between the institution and the individual: childcare workers should anticipate the parents' cautiousness or even anxiety due to earlier experiences
5. Take into consideration that the parents have met many well-meaning consultants and their well-intentioned recommendations before

Basis for co-operation

6. Assume that most children, parents and childcare workers live in normal circumstances – at least according to the variety admitted by the society they live in and whatever this means in reality for the quality of daily life.
7. Take into consideration that professionals need the parents' knowledge and expertise.
8. Childcare workers have to explain their work – parents do not need to justify their actions,
9. Take into account that vague agreements and/or serious reasons might be at the root of the parents' reactions if something goes wrong – they neither wish to disappoint nor insult you
10. Discuss competences and resources – not deficits

Ensuring co-operation

11. Securing partnership means granting equal rights to all people involved
12. First of all look for reasons within the institution or the organisational context if parents do not co-operate.

Based on research, and good practice case studies within the **PEAL project in the UK (Connor and Wheeler, 2009)**, it was concluded that respectful relationships and partnerships with families is achieved when:

- » ECEC services think through the quality of relationships with families and avoid making assumptions about parents or assigning 'group characteristics' to any particular community
- » Listen to parents as individuals and spend time getting to know families
- » Show interest in different perspectives and build on families existing strengths
- » Regularly exchange information about individual children with parents
- » Listen to what parents have to say about their own child's capabilities and interests, and make use of these observations for future planning
- » Directly support children's learning at home with suggested activities and the load of materials that complement what happens in the setting.

Outcomes of parental engagement in early learning

In 2011, the Office of Head Start, US Department Health and Human Services identified seven parent and family engagement outcomes as follows:

- » Family well-being Parents and families are safe, healthy and have increased financial security.
- » Positive parent-child relationships Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their children's learning and development.
- » Families as lifelong educators Parents and families observe, guide, promote and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school and in their communities.
- » Families as learners Parents and families advance their own learning interests through education, training and/or other experiences that support their parenting, career, and life goals.
- » Family engagement in transitions Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including Early Head Start (EHS) to Head Start (HS), EHS/HS to other early learning environments, and HS to kindergarten through elementary school.
- » Family connections to peers and community Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.
- » Families as advocates and leaders Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision making, programme policy development, and in community and state organising activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.

(Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, cited in Early Childhood Matters, November 2011: 23).

APPENDIX 2: Letter from Minister for Education, Culture and Science, Marja van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart to Chair of the Parliament, on topic of parental involvement, 29th November 2011

> Retouradres Postbus 16375 2500 BJ Den Haag

De voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal
Postbus 20018
2500 EA DEN HAAG

Rijnstraat 50
Den Haag
Postbus 16375
2500 BJ Den Haag
www.rijksoverheid.nl

Onze referentie
350297

Datum 29 november 2011
Betreft Ouderbetrokkenheid

De Onderwijsraad adviseert in haar advies 'Ouders als partners' de komende tijd vooral te investeren in partnerschap tussen ouders en school. Investeren in educatief partnerschap is belangrijk. Het thema ouderbetrokkenheid gaat voor mij echter over meer dan dat. Het gaat ook over de ouders als opvoeder, de school als gemeenschap en het gezag van de leraar.

Ouderbetrokkenheid: een opgave voor ouders en scholen

Goed ouderschap is van fundamenteel belang. Ouders die investeren in een goede opvoeding hebben daar thuis veel plezier van én leggen het fundament voor prestaties en welzijn op school en later in de samenleving. Ik heb grote waardering voor ouders die hun kinderen een goede basis meegeven. Hoewel een groot aantal ouders zich actief en betrokken opstelt bij de leerontwikkeling van hun kinderen, constateer ik tegelijkertijd dat de opvoeding onder druk staat. Het is voor veel ouders een hele opgave de juiste balans te vinden tussen werk, gezinsleven en andere activiteiten, dat realiseer ik mij terdege. Toch vind ik het van belang dat alle ouders prioriteit geven aan de opvoeding en aan de overdracht van waarden en normen. En dat ze, wanneer hun kinderen naar school gaan, tijd maken om deze cruciale fase zo goed mogelijk te begeleiden. Dit geldt niet alleen voor ouders die worstelen met het vinden van de juiste balans. Maar ook voor ouders die door andere factoren een beperking ervaren in de relatie met de school, bijvoorbeeld omdat zij door een taalachterstand een barrière ervaren in het contact met de school van hun kinderen. De verantwoordelijkheid voor een goede schoolontwikkeling van het kind mag en kan niet alleen bij het onderwijs worden neergelegd. Ook ouders hebben daarin een cruciale rol. Door de keuze voor een school worden ouders medeverantwoordelijk voor het onderwijs en voor de schoolgemeenschap. Deze medeverantwoordelijkheid vraagt om betrokkenheid en openheid van twee kanten, zowel van ouders als van school.

Voor de school komt met de ouders een sociaal kapitaal van onschatbare waarde de school binnen. Van scholen en leraren vraagt het betrekken van ouders bij het leerproces dezelfde professionaliteit, zorg en aandacht als die ze besteden aan het onderwijs. Of zoals de pedagoog Micha de Winter het onlangs zei: 'Goede ouder-school relaties zijn minstens zo belangrijk als taal en rekenen'. Het een gaat niet ten koste van het ander, beide aandachtsgebieden zijn belangrijk en versterken elkaar. Uit de monitor ouderbetrokkenheid (2009) blijkt dat op dit moment 39% van de scholen in het primair onderwijs, en 31% in het voortgezet onderwijs,

Pagina 1 van 6

beleid hebben voor het verbeteren van het pedagogisch klimaat bij de leerlingen thuis, bijvoorbeeld om ouders te bewegen hun kinderen voor te lezen. Ik wil scholen stimuleren om dit op te pakken als onderdeel van hun professionaliteit.

Datum
29 november 2011
Onze referentie
350297

Wat betreft het vergroten van de ouderbetrokkenheid zie ik meerdere belangrijke kansen. Ouders kunnen een grotere rol spelen bij het verbeteren van de leerprestaties van hun kinderen. Verder zijn ze onmisbaar bij loopbaanoriëntatie en –begeleiding en bij het voorkomen van schooluitval en schoolverzuim. Als derde zijn ouders van belang voor de schoolgemeenschap, en kunnen scholen de vitaliteit van deze schoolgemeenschap versterken door ouders meer te betrekken.

Inzet van ouders en scholen voor betere leerprestaties

Het verhogen van de kwaliteit van het onderwijs is de belangrijkste opgave van scholen. Het verbeteren van de leerprestaties, en ervoor zorgen dat jongeren met een diploma het onderwijs verlaten, zijn dan ook belangrijke uitgangspunten in de actieprogramma's Basis voor Presteren (po), Beter Presteren (vo) en Focus op Vakmanschap (mbo). Deze opgave ligt niet alleen bij de scholen, betrokkenheid van ouders hierbij is essentieel. Onderzoek wijst keer op keer uit dat ouders een grote invloed hebben op de leerprestaties van hun kinderen. Dat begint bij het bieden van een veilige en stabiele omgeving, en bij een gestructureerd en stimulerend klimaat. Het helpt enorm als ouders thuis op jonge leeftijd lezen met hun kinderen, doorpraten over belevenissen, verhalen vertellen en discussiëren over maatschappelijke thema's. Daarnaast heeft positieve interactie met de school een gunstig effect op prestaties, zowel bij formele als bij informele ouderparticipatie.

De betrokkenheid van ouders is in het bijzonder van belang bij de taalontwikkeling van jonge kinderen. In het kader van de voor- en vroegschoolse educatie (vve) heb ik met de gemeenten afgesproken dat ze meer gaan doen om ouders te betrekken. De gemeenten gaan stimuleren dat ouders thuis ontwikkelactiviteiten doen, en ouders gaan participeren in de activiteiten op de voor- of vroegschool. Ook zijn er afspraken gemaakt over betere toeleiding van kinderen naar vve.

Het verbeteren van de leerprestaties vraagt om *wederkerigheid*. Scholen mogen ouders aanspreken op hun betrokkenheid. Andersom mogen ouders van scholen verwachten dat zij ouders actief betrekken bij de school en bij de ontwikkeling van de leerling. Het vraagt daarnaast actieve en blijvende inzet van scholen richting die ouders die vanwege bijvoorbeeld hun achtergrond of cultuur minder bij school betrokken zijn. Het vraagt ook om openheid van de school over de leerresultaten. Om voor ouders betrokkenheid mogelijk te maken moeten scholen ouders inzicht geven in de leerprestaties en de studievoortgang van hun kinderen, en in de kwaliteit van het onderwijs op de school. Met de PO-Raad en de VO-Raad ben ik in gesprek om de kwaliteitsgegevens van scholen toegankelijk te maken via een zogenaamd ouderportaal.

Inzet van ouders en scholen bij loopbaanoriëntatie en schooluitval

Het onderwijs is van grote waarde voor de toekomst en voor de maatschappelijke loopbaan van kinderen. Het is van belang dat ieder kind een startkwalificatie haalt en kiest voor een beroep dat niet alleen bij hem of haar past, maar dat ook goede kansen biedt op de arbeidsmarkt. Dit is niet alleen van belang voor de kinderen,

en het tot bloei laten komen van hun talenten, maar ook voor het onderwijs en voor de maatschappij.

Datum

29 november 2011

Onze referentie

350297

Scholen hebben de belangrijke taak hun leerlingen te helpen bij hun loopbaanoriëntatie en – begeleiding (lob). Omdat ouders belangrijke 'medebepalers' zijn voor een vervolgopleiding en een baan, liggen er kansen voor scholen bij het sterker betrekken van ouders bij dit proces. De samenwerking met ouders is dan ook een belangrijk onderdeel van de loopbaanscan die scholen gebruiken om hun loopbaanbeleid te beoordelen. In de bijbehorende 'Toolbox LOB' staan ook concrete suggesties voor, en goede voorbeelden van, de versterking van de samenwerking met ouders. Bijvoorbeeld het gedegen informeren van ouders over vervolgopleidingen, en het inzetten van ouders als stagebegeleiders of coach. Daarbij kan veel meer dan nu benut worden dat ouders zelf ook een beroep uitoefenen, waarmee zij een uitstekend rolmodel kunnen zijn voor de kinderen op school. Met de VO-Raad maak ik afspraken over extra aandacht voor de rol van ouders bij loopbaanoriëntatie en -begeleiding. Ook met de PO-Raad en de MBO-Raad wil ik hier het gesprek over aangaan.

In het kader van de aanpak voortijdig schoolverlaten zet het Regionale Meld- en Coördinatiepunt (RMC) de extra middelen ook in op het vergroten van de ouderbetrokkenheid. Hiermee worden ouders ingezet om schoolverzuim en schooluitval te voorkomen. Een voorbeeld hiervan is de toepassing van een systeem waarbij ouders een sms-bericht krijgen als hun kind ongeoorloofd afwezig is.

De ouders als onderdeel van de school als gemeenschap

Betrokkenheid van ouders bij hun eigen kind is noodzakelijk, maar niet voldoende. Ouders zijn ook van grote waarde voor de school als gemeenschap. Uit gesprekken die ik de afgelopen periode met scholen en ouders heb gevoerd, blijkt dat veel scholen en ouders hier ook al actief in zijn. Scholen dienen hierbij een visie te hebben op de rol van ouders bij de schoolgemeenschap, die past bij de wijk, bij de ouders en bij de school. Dit gaat verder dan dat ouders vrijwilliger zijn als voorleesvader of luizenmoeder, dat ze hun talenten en deskundigheid inzetten om het onderwijs te verrijken of dat ze participeren in de besluitvorming op de school. Het gaat mij er ook om dat ouders een rol spelen in de school als waardengemeenschap.

In het kader van de school als waardengemeenschap wil ik stimuleren dat scholen en ouders aan de voorkant goede afspraken maken over de wederzijdse verwachtingen, en over de waarden en normen die op de school gelden. Het gaat daarbij om het maken van niet-vrijblijvende afspraken, die vastgelegd worden in overeenkomsten tussen ouders en scholen waar beide voor tekenen. Bij de afspraken horen ook afspraken over het omgaan met conflicten. Het is belangrijk om hier aan de voorkant heldere afspraken over te maken, om te voorkomen dat een conflict uit de hand loopt. Ik zie mooie praktijkvoorbeelden van scholen die daarmee enorme winst boeken in de relatie tussen school, leerling en ouders.

De ouders hebben een belangrijke voorbeeldfunctie waar het gaat om het respecteren van de waarden en normen van de school. Dit betekent dat ouders een belangrijke taak hebben in het ondersteunen en respecteren van het gezag van de leraren. De leraar is de baas in de klas en de schooldirecteur bepaalt de regels binnen de school. De rol van ouders is om hun kinderen hierin op te

voeden. En niet om aangifte te doen tegen leraren die optreden tegen disrespect en een gebrek aan gezagsgetrouwheid. Als het desondanks uit de hand loopt, en escaleert tot geweld tegen leraren, is het aan de overheid om in te grijpen. Geweld tegen leraren wordt niet getolereerd. Sinds november 2010 is de strafeis voor geweld tegen werknemers met een publieke taak, waaronder leraren, dan ook verdubbeld. De aangiftebereidheid bij veel scholen en leraren blijkt echter laag. Om de aangiftebereidheid te verhogen heeft de regering afspraken gemaakt in het kader van het programma Veilige Publieke Taak (VPT). Hierin is opgenomen dat werkgevers namens de medewerker aangifte kunnen doen, dat er anoniem aangifte kan worden gedaan, dat er sprake zal zijn van lik-op-stuk beleid en dat het mogelijk zal zijn schade te verhalen.

Datum
29 november 2011
Onze referentie
350297

Het maatschappelijk debat over ouderbetrokkenheid

Het verbeteren van ouderbetrokkenheid is niet primair een kwestie van meer geld of meer regels. Het gaat om een mentaliteitsverandering bij betrokkenen. De afgelopen maanden heb ik met veel ouders, leerkrachten, schoolleiders en onderwijsorganisaties gesproken over ouderbetrokkenheid. Hieruit komt een nieuw besef naar voren dat de rol van de ouder te zeer een vergeten rol is. Veel ouders zijn, gewild of ongewild, in een consumentenrol terecht gekomen. Dit wil ik veranderen door een beroep te doen op scholen om niet te bescheiden te zijn om ouders te vragen zich in te zetten voor de school van hun kind. Ouders zijn vaker bereid om iets te doen dan scholen soms denken, maar de school moet de vraag om betrokkenheid en participatie wel expliciet maken. Dat vraagt voor sommige scholen om lef, maar het levert dan ook het nodige op. Daarnaast wil ik een appèl doen op ouders om prioriteit te geven aan de ontwikkeling en opvoeding van hun kinderen. Om in deze drukke tijden ten volle verantwoordelijkheid te nemen voor deze belangrijke taak.

In de mentaliteitsverandering bij scholen en ouders wil ik als minister van Onderwijs een voortrekkersrol vervullen. De laatste tijd merk ik ook dat er al veel discussie is over het thema ouderbetrokkenheid. Daarbij gaat het om de volgende vragen. Wat zijn de rollen en verantwoordelijkheden voor de ouders en voor de school? Wat heeft de school nodig in de thuissituatie? Wat hebben ouders nodig van de school? Hoe kunnen scholen op de beste manier het sociaal kapitaal van ouders benutten, die past bij de school en de wijk? Hoe kunnen andere organisaties als gemeentes en opvoedinstituten helpen om ouderbetrokkenheid tot een succes te maken? Hoe kunnen ouders er mede voor zorgen dat leerlingen de leraren met respect behandelen? Vanuit mijn rol zal ik het thema landelijk sterker op de kaart zetten en ga ik met zoveel mogelijk scholen, ouders en andere betrokkenen, zoals gemeentes en opvoedinstituten, het debat aan over ouderbetrokkenheid. Met deze debatten wil ik beter inzicht krijgen in wat er nog meer leeft op scholen en bij ouders, en wat ze nodig hebben om hun verantwoordelijkheid waar te maken.

De acties

Het verbeteren van ouderbetrokkenheid is zoals gezegd niet primair een kwestie van meer geld of regels. Het gaat om een mentaliteitsverandering en om het inschakelen van zoveel mogelijk maatschappelijke organisaties om scholen en ouders te helpen. Daar concentreren de acties zich op. Daarnaast wil ik als minister extra aandacht geven aan het gezag van de leraar.

Pagina 4 van 6

Datum

29 november 2011

Onze referentie

350297

Betrekken van maatschappelijke organisaties

Scholen en ouders kunnen alle hulp gebruiken bij het verbeteren van de ouderbetrokkenheid. Naast de acties die ik al eerder in deze brief heb genoemd, zet ik de volgende stappen:

- In de prestatie convenanten met de po- en vo-sector maak ik afspraken om de ouderbetrokkenheid te versterken. Belangrijk doel hierbij is te zorgen dat ouders ondersteunend zijn om het doel uit de actieprogramma's, het allerbeste uit onze kinderen halen, te realiseren.
- In de afspraken van het programmamanagement MBO15 over de voortgang van het Actieplan MBO "Focus op vakmanschap 2011-2015" is er ook aandacht voor het verbeteren van ouderbetrokkenheid.
- Mede door de motie van het lid Biskop bij de behandeling van de Verzuimwet in februari 2011 ben ik in overleg met de MBO Raad en Ingrado over een verzuimaanpak gericht op het beter melden van verzuim door de mbo-instellingen en op een grotere betrokkenheid van ouders.
- Met de landelijke ouderorganisaties heb ik prestatieafspraken gemaakt over het ondersteunen van scholen tot het sluiten van school-ouderovereenkomsten, en bij het betrekken van ouders bij taal- en rekenprestaties.
- Van de Landelijke Pedagogische Centra heb ik gevraagd begin 2012 een overzicht van goede voorbeelden van ouderbetrokkenheid te leveren. Deze voorbeelden komen digitaal beschikbaar en ik zal ze nadrukkelijk onder de aandacht brengen van scholen en ouders.
- Met de partijen in de onderwijsinfrastructuur (schoolbegeleidingsdiensten en uitgevers) ga ik afspraken maken om het vele materiaal dat ze hebben ontwikkeld voor ouderbetrokkenheid, en voor ouders om thuis te helpen bij het onderwijs, transparant te maken voor scholen en ouders.
- In overleg met de kennisinstellingen wil ik een bijzondere leerstoel instellen om robuuste kennis op te bouwen. Deze leerstoel richt zich op ouderbetrokkenheid, en zal verbonden zijn aan de lectoraten op de Pabo's.
- Met de VO-Raad ben ik in gesprek om onder de noemer Schoolkompas een ouderportaal te maken, zodat de gegevens over de kwaliteit van scholen die in Vensters voor Verantwoording staan toegankelijk worden voor ouders. Dezelfde afspraak wil ik ook met de PO-Raad maken, als onderdeel van Vensters Primair Onderwijs.
- In overleg met de Stichting Leraar Leerling Ouders zal worden bekeken wat ik kan doen om het recent door hen gelanceerde keurmerk ouderbetrokkenheid te ondersteunen.

De bovenstaande acties richten zich vooral op de organisaties die direct gelieerd zijn aan het onderwijs. Aan een deel van de uitdagingen op het gebied van ouderbetrokkenheid ligt een bredere problematiek binnen het gezin ten grondslag, en is een bredere samenwerking nodig. In overleg met de maatschappelijke organisaties op die terreinen zal ik bezien of het nodig is om ook hier nadere afspraken te maken.

Het gezag van de leraar

Het herstel van het gezag van de leraar is voor mij een belangrijk onderdeel van de waarden en normen op de school. Ik heb met de sectororganisaties en de vakbonden overleg gehad over wat hiervoor nodig is. Mede op basis van dit gesprek kom ik tot de volgende acties:

- Scholen wil ik stimuleren dat ze in de school-ouderovereenkomsten expliciet aandacht besteden aan de waarden en normen binnen de school, het gezag van de leraar, en aan de omgangsvormen tussen leraar, leerling en ouder.
- In samenwerking met de minister van Veiligheid en Justitie en Binnenlandse Zaken ga ik, in aanvulling op het programma VPT, in kaart brengen waarom de aangiftebereidheid op scholen laag is, en wat gedaan kan worden om dit te verbeteren. Op basis hiervan wil ik afspraken maken met de schoolbesturen om de aangiftebereidheid te verhogen.

Datum

29 november 2011

Onze referentie

350297

De sociale partners hebben in het genoemde overleg aangegeven dat ze de mogelijke meerwaarde verkennen van een ombudsfunctie voor leraren in de nasleep van geweldsdelicten.

Persoonlijk appèl op ouders en scholen

Vanuit mijn rol als minister van Onderwijs wil ik een persoonlijk appèl doen op ouders om zich in te zetten voor het leerproces hun kinderen, voor de school en voor het respect voor de school en het werk dat daar gedaan wordt. Hiervoor onderneem ik de volgende acties:

- In 2012 maak ik een tour door het land om het debat aan te gaan met alle betrokkenen bij de school en de opvoeding. De gesprekken vinden plaats op de scholen, de plaats waar ouders en scholen samen de schoolgemeenschap vormen.
- Via de social media wil ik het gesprek aangaan over onderwijs en de opvoeding. En over waarden op de school, en de betrokkenheid van ouders daarbij.
- Eind 2012 organiseer ik een conferentie waarin ouderbetrokkenheid centraal staat. De belangrijkste opbrengsten uit de schoolgesprekken, mijn tour door het land, online discussies en goede praktijkvoorbeelden, staan in deze conferentie centraal.

Vanzelfsprekend zal ik de Kamer informeren over de opbrengsten van de debatten en van de conferentie.

Tot slot

Veel ouders en scholen zetten zich dagelijks in voor de ontwikkeling en de opvoeding van hun kinderen en leerlingen, en voor de schoolgemeenschap. Mijn wens is dat alle ouders en alle scholen de handen ineenslaan voor wat hen beiden drijft: de ontwikkeling van de talenten van hun kind of leerling. Hier heeft niet alleen het kind recht op, maar dit is tevens van grote waarde voor de samenleving, nu en in de toekomst.

De minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap,

Marja van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart

Marja van Bijsterveldt

APPENDIX 3

Table 1A : *Forms of parental involvement in early learning at home and in community*

Form of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Informal at home parenting	<p>Sensitive responsive interactions between parents and children during:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » personal care, dressing, feeding, washing » playing together » singing songs/rhymes together » playing together, indoors -outdoors » sharing books/reading stories » household chores: preparing food, setting table, cleaning, sorting clothes, gardening » watching TV, DVDs, computer together <p>Walks – outings together: to park, playground, library, shops, kinderboerderij</p> <p>Transfer of norms, attitudes, values such as: motivation, respect, turn taking</p> <p>Parents communication of aspirations for children</p>	<p>Quantity and quality of cognitive stimulation and parental sensitivity related to positive child development. Generally lower in ethnic minority families and lower educated parents. Family stress due to socio-economic disadvantage main cause for difference – not cultural explanations (Mesman, 2010; Mesman et al. forthcoming).</p> <p>Up to 2008 number of poor children in NL falling but economic downturn has led to downturn in this trend. Single-parent families with only young children were relatively most often poor. Risk of long-term poverty also highest among these families + among non-Western households.</p> <p>Immigrant and non-immigrant fathers desire to be more involved in children's upbringing. Barriers identified in some immigrant groups:</p> <p>Chinese fathers working long hours in their restaurants; some Creole fathers not living with their children; average Moroccan father very insistent on breadwinner role – although large variation in Moroccan fathers (Distelbrink et al. 2005 in van de Hoek en Pels, 2008).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Amount of time Dutch parents invest in childrearing doubled in last 30 years. » Childrearing priorities amongst parents are: autonomy, assertiveness, conformity and social feeling . In general no difference between fathers and mothers in these priorities (Gezinsrapport, 2011). » Lower quality of childrearing evident in vulnerable groups: one parent families, lower educated parents, and low income parents (Gezinsrapport, 2011). » 72% parents report talking daily to their primary school going children about school. » 50% parents report reading aloud at least once per week to child. » A third of parents report helping with homework at least once a week (Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009)

Form of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Non-formal/semi-organised with other parents and children in the community	<p>Meeting up with other parents and children in the playgroundswimming pool</p> <p>Attendance with children at (occasional) community organized play and cultural events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » library read books aloud events (free); » family events in museums; » music festivals; » national play day events; » cinekids; theatre. 		
Regular and organized non-formal learning activities in the community	<p>Music, movement, dance classes/groups in community centres, and cultural centres</p> <p>Swimming lessons, sports clubs</p> <p>Primarily focused on children from age 4 years</p>	<p>Poor children less likely to participate in non-formal, extra curricular activities than non-poor children.</p> <p>In 2008 and 2009 Municipalities received extra financial support from government so non-participating children can join sport clubs, attend music lessons. Initiative called: Kinderen Doen Mee</p>	<p>Monitoring report of Kinderen Doen Mee initiative: impact of initiative was much less than envisaged. Non participation reduced by 9% (aim was 50%).</p> <p>Reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Parents insufficiently aware of possibilities » Poor children whose parents not on social assistance benefit not fully on radar of local authorities » Children participate less if social participation of parents also low (Roest, 2011)

Table 1B. *Forms of support and interventions for childrearing and parental involvement in early learning at home and in the community*

Forms of support	Illustrative examples	Prevalence	Research and evaluation findings
Informal support for parents (informal network support)	<p>Asking family advice regarding child-rearing and education.</p> <p>Sharing care and education with extended family or friends/ neighbours</p> <p>Sharing experiences with other parents in informal parent networks in parents (mothers) groups, or at school</p>	<p>Low educated parents and parents where neither working receive relatively little informal support from parents/parents-in law, friends, compared to middle and higher educated and working parents (Gezinsrapport, 2011).</p> <p>According to Onderwijsraad (2010) parents involvement in informal parent community not sufficiently developed</p>	<p>» Van de Hoek en Pels (2008) note a hybrid form of upbringing amongst immigrant groups. Authoritarian and more 'authoritative' approaches hand-in-hand and continuity remains an important aspect.</p> <p>» Maintenance of culture of origin in host country can be adaptive to parental well-being. More connectedness to the culture of origin does not necessarily lead to less connectedness to the culture of the immigration country (Yaman et al. 2010).</p> <p>» Older children play a part in increasing involvement of first generation mothers – spur them on to learn Dutch, take classes, become more involved in education of their younger children (van der Hoek and Pels, 2008).</p>
Online support from other parents, parents-support networks	<p>Discussion forum pages on Ouders online: www.ouders.nl</p> <p>Other online parenting support for particular groups: www.tienermoeders.nl www.jongvader.nl</p> <p>www.kopopouders.nl for parents with stress, psychiatric illness or addiction problems.</p>	<p>Ouders Online described as the largest parent community in the Netherlands – 300,000 visitors per month, 30,000 messages on Forum</p>	<p>Young fathers often seek information online (van Lier, 2007). Fewer support advice services available to young fathers, more difficult for them to ask and receive help (Raap and van Coblign, 2009).</p>

Forms of support	Illustrative examples	Prevalence	Research and evaluation findings
Drop-in (professional) advice and helplines in the community	<p>Family Centres (CJG) including Health Clinic 4 core tasks of CJG:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signaling, analyzing and referral to more specialized help 2. Support, information and advice to parents 3. Organisation of integrated care 4. Monitoring, screening and vaccination (VNG, 2011) <p>Asking advice from practitioners in daycare, play groups (PSZ), school</p>	<p>In May 2011, 313 (out of total of 421) municipalities had CJG working according to statutory criteria.</p> <p>In most municipalities CJG consists of one or more walk in points plus a back office.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Parents more likely to get upbringing support/advice from kinderopvang, psz and school than from CJG/consultatie bureau/school doctor/social work services (Gezinsrapport, 2011) (See Table 2) » Parents of younger children have more frequent contact with these services for advice and are more satisfied about contact, and have more need for advice (Gezinsrapport, 2011) » Groups of parents who are not receiving sufficient support are: parents with low income, lone parent families and families with young children (Gezinsrapport, 2011).
Parenting courses	<p>Delivered by local welfare organisations and GGD: Focussed primarily on positive behavior management strategies rather than learning and development.</p> <p>Examples: Triple P (Positive parenting programme), a multi-level parenting course which includes both individual parent training and group parenting training.</p> <p>Opvoeden & Zo, easily accessible training for parents of primary school age children</p> <p>Gordon Effective Communication with Children</p>	<p>Triple P on offer in more than 100 municipalities. Only way for professionals to access Triple P materials is through training offered by NJi. In 2010, 155 trainings provided to more than 6,000 people</p> <p>Gordon Parenting Courses available in locations around NL.</p> <p>Cost to parents: €250 for 10 sessions. Some health insurance companies cover part of the costs. Client group primarily middle-class parents</p>	

Forms of support	Illustrative examples	Prevalence	Research and evaluation findings
Home-based parenting support (professional led)	<p>Voorzorg (-9 to 19 months), intended for young, low educated women pregnant with first child. Intervention lasts 2.5 years</p> <p>Stevig Ouderschap (0-18 months) considered a primary prevention programme against child maltreatment.</p> <p>Note: neither of these interventions could be considered as focusing on early learning.</p>	In 2012, 36 Voorzorg nurses operating in 27 municipalities, reaching 352 young women.	<p>Interventions aimed at improving ethnic minority children's well-being should focus both on reducing family stress and enhancing parental sensitivity (Mesman et al. forthcoming).</p> <p>Voorzorg effect study shows that correct group being reached. 98% have 4 or more risk factors. Smoking decreased during pregnancy. At 6 months, more likely to be breastfeeding (14%) compared to control group (6%) (www.voorzorg.info)</p>
Home-based parenting support (para-professional/ trained volunteers)	<p>Moeders Informeren Moeders (MIM) (first time mothers, 0 – 18 months)</p> <p>Home Start (one child at least under 6)</p>	<p>In 2010, MIM implemented in 19 locations reaching 844 mothers in total. 64% mothers non-native Dutch. 39% volunteers non-native Dutch. Sometimes delivered in combination with HomeStart (in 5 municipalities) or with Boekenpret (in 2 municipalities)</p> <p>HomeStart implemented in 119 municipalities. 2350 families supported each week involving 4750 children.</p>	<p>MIM 2002 effect study: No significant effects on health or feeding factors. Did have a positive effect on childrearing competencies (Hanrahan, 2002).</p> <p>HomeStart evaluation: positive impact on parental well-being, child-rearing competencies, increase in positive parenting behaviours, decrease in negative parenting behaviours (Asscher, 2005).</p>
Community based parenting support. Parents and Children together	<p>Facilitated (often by Welfare organisations): mother and baby/toddler groups: Example: Moeder-Babygroepen in Overvecht – Cumulus Welzijn – separate groups for Turkish, Dutch and Moroccan communities, and Parent-Child groups (1.5 to 4 yrs) weekly meetings for mothers and children who don't attend any form of centre-based ECEC. www.cumuluswelzijn.nl/BabysPeuters/Voorouders.aspx</p> <p>Teenage parents groups: Jonge Moedergroep, CJG Haarlemmermeer</p> <p>See Case Studies (Part 2) for further examples</p>		Immigrant parents look for support from outside the home, clubs, associations to maintain continuity in values, culture and religion with country of origin (van de Hoek en Pels, 2006).

Forms of support	Illustrative examples	Prevalence	Research and evaluation findings
<p>Home-based play, learning and language/ literacy programmes</p> <p>(some of which work as Combination home-based and centre based play and learning programmes)</p>	<p>Approved by NJi as theoretically effective: Instapje (1 year-olds) Opstap (2 – 4 year olds) Opstap (4-6 year olds) Linked to school based Overstap and Stap Door!</p> <p>Jij bent belangrijk Boekenpret (0-6 yrs, focus stimulating parents to read aloud)</p> <p>VVE Thuis (for parents of children attending VVE centre-based programmes)</p> <p>Not yet approved as theoretically effective: Bij de Hand, Rugzaak, Spel aan Huis, Samenspel</p>	<p>These programmes tend to be specifically designed for and targeted at so called 'target group' families (low ses and /or migrant groups).</p> <p>In 2012, NJi estimate that 4,000 to 5,000 families avail of home-based programmes. 58 municipalities support Opstap, 11 support Instapje, and 15 support VVE Thuis (although this number is growing). Smaller numbers are supporting Jij bent belangrijk and Boekenpret.</p>	<p>Critical Learning Community and academic researchers consulted strongly in favour of combination approach. Better coherence and linkages between services around young children (Roetman and Schepers, 2012)</p>

Table 2. *Forms of parental involvement in early learning in formal centre-based ECEC settings (daycare, preschool playgroups, pre-schools)*

Forms of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Daily informal contact	<p>Informal face to face discussions, sharing information about children between parents and practitioners at arrival and home time.</p> <p>Email, sms and telephone contact Recipients of information via newsletters, notices centre website</p>	There has been no national monitoring research regarding parental involvement in centre based ECEC settings (daycare, preschool playgroups, pre-schools). See Case Study reports (Part 3) and Research and evaluation (right side column for further information)	<p>Parents more likely to get upbringing support/advice from kinderopvang, psz and school than from CJG/consultatie bureau/school doctor/social work services (Gezinsrapport, 2011) (See Table 1)</p> <p>Parents differ greatly regarding the kind of interaction they need. Can range from fairly neutral availability of information, to self-help style group discussions on subjects relating to child-rearing, to a range of courses (van der Hoek en Pels, 2008).</p> <p>One sided flow of information from educators to parents failing to meet parents' needs. Little communication with parents about pedagogic methods professionals use, and about parents own views (van der Hoek en Pels, 2008).</p> <p>Little help for immigrant parents for issues and problems they face such as finding the balance between their traditional ways and many demands of the new society (Pels, 2004).</p> <p>Mutual sharing of information regarding children's learning and development between parents and practitioners not evident in study of primary schools in Rotterdam (Smit et al. 2005)</p>
Planned and organized parent and practitioner meetings	<p>» Intake meeting » Home visit of practitioner » Developmental/progress meeting » Special room where parents and practitioners can talk</p> <p>Parents asked their views on programme, how they deal with current issues at home</p>		

Forms of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Parents participation in centres events	<p>Parents welcome as observers in centre</p> <p>Occasional open days with children</p> <p>Occasional 'festive days' with children</p> <p>Centre based parent talks and information events (ouderavond)</p>		
Parents as volunteers	<p>'Helping hands' on trips, art projects/messy play, reading stories</p> <p>Parents active in organization of events</p> <p>Participation in workgroups</p> <p>Participation in fundraising events</p>		
Parents representing parents in advice and governance	Oudercommissies		<p>Recommendations arising from eQuality-Boink research regarding diversity in Oudercommissie:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. advisability of approaching parents personally re becoming involved in daycare centre 2. Subdividing oudercommissies into Activity, events group and management and governance group.
Parent organized crèches	Creches managed and staff by parents cooperative	<p>Only 6 parent organized crèches in NL, four of them in Wittevrouwenwijk, Utrecht (Huisman, 2011).</p> <p>On 24 Nov. announced that law is being amended so these 6 creches don't have to meet regulations regarding minimum training for staff. From 2013, parents will not be eligible for Kinderopvangtoeslag.</p> <p>http://www.nationaleonderwijsgids.nl/ANP/kov/7845/Oudercreches-mogen-blijven-bestaan</p>	

Table 3. *Forms of parental involvement in early learning in primary school settings*

Form of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Daily informal contact	Informal face to face discussions, sharing information about child(ren) between parents and practitioners at arrival and home time (Two-way sharing)		<p>Uneducated parents unable to offer much educational support, because of their lack of knowledge and have a great reverence for teachers' authority and expertise (van de Hoek en Pels, 2008).</p> <p>82% primary schools have a vision for parental involvement. 10% have separate vision document. 37% schools have member of staff responsible for co-ordinating Parental Involvement (Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009)</p>
Exchange of written information	<p>Email, sms and telephone contact</p> <p>Parents view/contribute to child's portfolio</p> <p>Parents recipients of information newsletters, notices</p> <p>School website</p>		<p>96% parents report schools inform them about learning progress of their child. Almost 40% parents report receiving written or oral advice about helping children with homework (Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009).</p>
Planned and organized parent and teacher meeting	<p>Intake meeting</p> <p>Introductory visit</p> <p>Home visit of practitioner</p> <p>Developmental/progress meeting: 10 minute meetings</p>		
Parents participation in schools events	<p>Opendays</p> <p>Occasional 'festive days'</p> <p>School based parent talks and information events</p>		

Form of parental involvement	Illustrative examples	Prevalence – Inclusive of all groups of parents, fathers and mothers, minority groups?	Research and evaluation findings
Parents as volunteers	<p>'Helping hands' on trips, art projects, reading stories, checking hairlice</p> <p>Parents active in organization of events</p> <p>Participation in workgroups</p> <p>Participation in fundraising events</p>		<p>55% Primary school directors report its important to involve parents in organization of out-of-school events .</p> <p>Almost ¾ of parents report they are active at least once a year in helping out in school events (Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009).</p>
Parents as learners	<p>language and literacy interventions:</p> <p>Story Sacks</p> <p>Language classes for parents</p>		
Home-school liaison	<p>Rotterdam –ouderconsulenten operating, strengthening relations between schools, parents and other services. Organise house visits, with present and information folder about all early learning services in neighbourhood. Reach 80% of 2 year olds (see Case Studies, Part 2)</p>	<p>200 ouderconsulenten</p> <p>150 focus on families with primary school children</p> <p>50 focus on families with 2 year-olds.</p> <p>Ouderconsulenten in Rotterdam reach 80% of 2 year olds</p>	
Parents to parent contact	Ouderkamer- parent room		
Parents representing parents	<p>Ouderraad</p> <p>MR</p> <p>Ouderplatform/Klankbordgroep (Consultation groups)</p>	<p>Primarily higher educated parents participate in MR and School management board (Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009)..</p>	<p>84% Primary schools have ouderraad.</p> <p>32% Primary schools have Klankbordgroep (Consultation groups)</p> <p>Monitor Ouderbetrokkenheid, Kans et al. 2009).</p>
Research, advice and capacity building of ECEC organisations and primary schools re parental involvement	<p>Relevant organisations:</p> <p>Boink, eQuality, Mutant, Stichting de Meeuw, Sardes, Kleurrijke Scholen, Verwey Jonker Institute, Expertise Centrum Ouder School en Buurt, ITS, Radboud Universiteit</p>	<p>Relevant websites:</p> <p>Ouderbetrokkenheid.nl</p> <p>Oudersbijdeles.nl</p> <p>Relevant Linked-in Group:</p> <p>@ouders, school, buurt</p>	<p>On 30th November 2011, Min. OCW announced the establishment of a Special Professorship on parental involvement (Minister OCW, 2011)</p>

